

Bring your specialist home with telehealth

The way we deliver some of our services has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Telehealth has been used successfully to connect people living in remote communities with doctors and specialists for many years. To help protect our healthcare workforce and vulnerable members of our community during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Federal Government has expanded telehealth services, making them available to all Australians with a Medicare card. With telehealth people can see Castlemaine Health allied health clinicians including physiotherapists, speech pathologists, dietitians and occupational therapists, using their smart phone or computer. Maintaining social distancing while continuing to provide much needed care and advice to patients.

How does it work?

Castlemaine Health is using healthdirect Video Call, a secure video consulting service managed by Healthdirect Australia on behalf of the Australian Department of Health and the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services. All you need to connect is a laptop, tablet or smart phone with a camera and microphone and an internet connection. Attending an appointment is as easy as clicking an email link to hear, see and speak to your specialist. The team say, age isn't proving any barrier to the new technology with patients right up to their 80s using it with great success; many quite surprised their phones could be used for this purpose and enjoying learning a new skill. "health direct Video Call is purpose-built for health settings," says Castlemaine Health Community Rehabilitation Centre receptionist, Rachelle McLean. "The virtual clinics are fully secure so everything is private and confidential and connecting is really straight forward. The feedback from patients has been very positive."

A clinic in your lounge room

Castlemaine Health physiotherapist Natalie Parham says seeing clients moving and demonstrating exercises is the biggest advantage of Telehealth over phone consultations. "We can see improvements in range of motion, assess injuries and get a great look at a client physically without the need for them to come in," says Natalie.

Castlemaine Health paediatric speech pathologist Georgia Penman (seated), physiotherapist Natalie Parham (standing) and receptionist Rachelle McLean (on screen) have been been thrilled with how well telehealth consultations are working.



Get the most out of your telehealth appointment

- If you haven't used the video function on your phone or computer do a test run first.
- Find a quiet, private space. Switch your phone to 'do not disturb' and let anyone else in your home know what you're doing to avoid interruptions.
- Think about where you sit so you can be seen clearly.
- Make sure you have enough space if you need to move about and have any equipment ready.
- Have any test results, prescriptions or questions ready.
- Have a pen and paper handy in case you need to write anything down.

"We can offer the same level of care with the exception of soft tissue or hands-on treatments," she says. "For those hands-on modalities we might suggest stretches or movements to achieve a similar result." Natalie can organise equipment but she says patients are getting quite creative, with cans of spaghetti and drink bottles standing in for dumbbells and hand weights. "You don't always have to go out and buy equipment," she says. "You'd be surprised by how much you have at home." Paediatric speech pathologist Georgia Penman says Telehealth has delivered some unexpected benefits. "We're finding that because parents are getting more involved with sessions children are doing lot more home practice and making huge gains, especially the younger children." "I think parents are finding it easier to get involved and the children are really benefitting from the increased focus." Georgia mixes video consultations with email and phone contact and has been posting out resources for home practice. "Being flexible and dynamic is essential," she says. "What works for one child might not work for another so programs are totally individual."



Telehealth may not be right for all healthcare problems. In some cases face-to-face or phone consultations will still be needed. Your allied health professional will let you know what's right for you. For more information contact:

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