



## EXTENDING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR AGED CARE RESIDENTS DURING COVID-19

Last updated: 23 December 2020

From 10 December 2020 to 30 June 2022, the Australian Government has expanded the *Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS)* (Better Access) initiative to aged care residents. Over this period, all eligible aged care residents can access up to 20 Medicare subsidised individual psychological services each calendar year under the Better Access initiative.

The expansion recognises the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of people in residential aged care, and addresses recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety's [Aged care and COVID-19: a special report](#). This fact sheet provides information on the expansion for practitioners.

### What do the changes mean for practitioners?

From 10 December 2020 to 30 June 2022, eligible practitioners can deliver individual Better Access services to aged care residents. Services can be delivered face-to-face in aged care facilities, through telehealth (until 31 March 2021) and in practitioners' consulting rooms. To support practitioners in delivering Better Access services face-to-face in aged care facilities, flag fall items are available for the first resident attended during each attendance at a facility (further detail on page two).

### Who is eligible?

In line with the broader Better Access initiative, support is available to aged care residents with a diagnosed mental disorder who would benefit from a structured, multi-disciplinary approach to the management of their treatment. The conditions classified as mental disorders for the purposes of these services are informed by the [World Health Organisation's 1996 Diagnostic and Management Guidelines for Mental Disorders in Primary Care: ICD-10 Chapter V Primary Care Version](#).

### How can aged care residents access Better Access?

To access support under Better Access, aged care residents require an approved Mental Health Treatment Plan developed by their General Practitioner (GP) or a Psychiatrist Assessment and Management Plan developed by a psychiatrist. Once a GP has completed a Mental Health Treatment plan they can provide the resident with a referral for mental health services under Better Access.



## What information should referrals for Better Access services contain?

There is no single template for referrals, however referrals should include the aged care resident's:

- Name
- Date of birth
- Address
- Diagnosis
- List of any current medications
- Number of sessions they are being referred for (the 'course of treatment').

Where a practitioner receives a referral that does not specify the number of sessions the aged care resident is being referred for, they should contact the referring practitioner to obtain clarification.

## How many Better Access sessions can a resident be referred for in a single referral?

When a GP prepares a Mental Health Treatment Plan for a resident of an aged care facility, they can refer the resident for an initial course of treatment of up to six sessions. The number of sessions in the initial course of treatment must be specified on the referral.

Following the completion of the initial course of treatment, the GP must undertake a review. If they consider the resident would benefit from additional sessions, they can provide a referral for up to four more Better Access sessions before conducting another review. Again, the number of sessions the resident is being referred for should be clearly stated on the referral.

Once ten sessions have been completed, the reviewing practitioner can provide a referral for up to ten more sessions if they consider this is clinically appropriate, noting a resident can access 20 Better Access sessions in a calendar year.

## Do practitioners need to claim a 'review' item when referring a patient for additional sessions?

If a resident of an aged care facility has already had a review of their Mental Health Treatment Plan in the last three months, the practitioner will not be able to claim a 'review' item for the patient to access further Better Access sessions. This is due to the claiming restrictions on review items under the MBS.

Where a practitioner is referring a resident for a further course of treatment within three months of a review, the practitioner can claim one of the consultation items.

## Can a referral for Better Access services be used across multiple calendar years?

To ensure flexibility, referrals for Better Access services can be used across multiple calendar years, as long as no more than 20 services are accessed in any one calendar year. This is consistent with the existing referral process for Better Access services in the broader community.



If a resident of an aged care facility is referred for a specific number of Better Access services and they do not use the full number of services stated on the referral by the end of the calendar year, they can continue to use the referral to access remaining services in the next calendar year.

Any services accessed in the following calendar year will count towards the maximum of 20 services in that calendar year. For example, if a resident of an aged care facility is referred for six services in 2021 and only uses four services before 31 December 2021, they can continue to use this referral to access the remaining two services on that referral until 30 June 2022.

Once the resident has used all of the services stated on their referral, they will require a new referral to access any additional services up to the maximum of 20 services per calendar year.

## Which practitioners can deliver psychological services under Better Access?

GPs, other medical practitioners, psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists can deliver Better Access psychological services, provided they are registered with Medicare Australia as meeting the eligibility requirements to claim the relevant MBS items.

## Which MBS items can be used?

A table of all new and existing MBS items that can be used by each category of practitioner that can deliver Better Access services is at [Appendix A](#).

## Are flag fall items available?

Flag fall items are available to GPs, other medical practitioners and allied health professionals when delivering individual face-to-face Better Access services in aged care facilities. The flag fall can be claimed for the first resident attended during each attendance at a facility. An overview of each of the flag fall items is below:

Practitioner	Flag fall item number	Benefit	Restrictions
GPs	90001	\$56.75	Can be claimed <u>only</u> for the first resident attended during each in-person attendance at an aged care facility when claiming items 2733, 2735, 93400, 93401, 93402, 93403, 93421, 93287 or 93288.
Other medical practitioners	90002	\$41.25	Can be claimed <u>only</u> for the first resident attended during each in-person attendance at an aged care facility when claiming items 941, 942, 93431, 93432, 93433, 93434, 93451, 93291 or 93292.
Allied health professionals	90003	\$40.00	Can be claimed <u>only</u> for the first resident attended during each in-person attendance at an aged care facility when claiming items 93312, 93313, 93316, 93319, 93322, 93323, 93326, 93327, 93375, 93376, 93381 to 93386.



## Can practitioners deliver services by phone and telehealth?

Until 31 March 2021, practitioners can deliver individual Better Access telehealth and phone services to all eligible aged care residents, provided it is safe and clinically appropriate to do so. This aligns with the end date for the [COVID-19 temporary MBS telehealth services](#) and use of the items must comply with the rules for these items.

No specific equipment is required to provide Medicare-compliant telehealth services. Practitioners must ensure that their chosen telecommunications solution meets their clinical requirements and satisfies privacy laws. To assist providers with their privacy obligations, a privacy checklist for telehealth services is available on [MBS Online](#). Further information is on the [Australian Cyber Security Centre website](#).

Please note, there is no change to the rules that apply to telehealth items for Modified Monash Model areas four to seven.

## Are practitioners required to bulk bill aged care residents?

There is no requirement for practitioners to bulk bill aged care residents. It is at the practitioners' discretion to determine the appropriate billing arrangement, noting aged care residents will only receive the rebate amount attached to the relevant item in the MBS.

## Are practitioners required to follow COVID-19 safe practices?

All services delivered under the expansion are required to align with COVID-19 safe practices. More information on how to stay COVID-19 safe can be found on the [Department of Health website](#).

## Who was consulted on the changes?

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety recommended the immediate creation of MBS items to facilitate access to additional mental health supports for residents of aged care. Consultation was undertaken with relevant stakeholders to inform this measure.

## How will compliance with the new changes be monitored?

The Department of Health will monitor the use by practitioners of new and existing MBS items under the expansion and the number of sessions used by residents of aged care facilities. Use of the items that does not appear to be in accordance with relevant Medicare guidelines and legislation will be actioned appropriately.

## Where can I find more information?

The full item descriptor(s) and information on other changes to the MBS can be found on the MBS Online website at [www.mbsonline.gov.au](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au). You can also subscribe to future MBS updates by visiting [MBS Online](#) and clicking 'Subscribe'.



The Department of Health provides an email service for providers seeking advice on interpretation of the MBS items and rules, the *Health Insurance Act 1973* and associated regulations. If you have a query relating exclusively to interpretation of the Schedule, you should email [askMBS@health.gov.au](mailto:askMBS@health.gov.au).

In addition, you can subscribe to '[News for Health Professionals](#)' on the Services Australia website to receive regular news highlights.

If you are seeking advice in relation to Medicare billing, claiming, payments, or obtaining a provider number, please go to the Health Professionals page on the Services Australia website or contact the Services Australia on the Provider Enquiry Line – 13 21 50.

A list of the new and existing items that can be claimed under the expansion is at [Appendix A](#).

*Please note that the information provided is a general guide only. It is ultimately the responsibility of treating practitioners to use their professional judgment to determine the most clinically appropriate services to provide, and then to ensure that any services billed to Medicare fully meet the eligibility requirements outlined in the legislation.*

*This sheet is current as of the Last updated date shown above, and does not account for MBS changes since that date.*

## Appendix A – MBS item map for Better Access expansion to aged care residents

Item number	Service	Category	Group	Sub Group	Mode of service delivery	Service Length	RACF specific?	Flag fall for first occasion of service during a visit?*
<b>GENERAL PRACTITIONERS</b>								
93400	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training not completed)	1	A42	1	Face to face	20-40 mins	Yes	Yes
93401	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training not completed)	1	A42	1	Face to face	40+ mins	Yes	Yes
93402	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed)	1	A42	1	Face to face	20-40 mins	Yes	Yes
93403	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed)	1	A42	1	Face to face	40+ mins	Yes	Yes
93404	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training not completed)	1	A42	1	Telehealth*	20-40 mins	Yes	No
93405	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training not completed)	1	A42	1	Telehealth*	40+ mins	Yes	No
93406	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed)	1	A42	1	Telehealth*	20-40 mins	Yes	No
93407	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed)	1	A42	1	Telehealth*	40+ mins	Yes	No
93408	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed)	1	A42	1	Phone*	20-40 mins	Yes	No
93409	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed)	1	A42	1	Phone*	40+ mins	Yes	No
93410	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed)	1	A42	1	Phone*	20-40 mins	Yes	No
93411	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed)	1	A42	1	Phone*	40+ mins	Yes	No
93421	Review	1	A42	2	Face to face		Yes	Yes
93422	Review	1	A42	2	Telehealth*		Yes	No

Item number	Service	Category	Group	Sub Group	Mode of service delivery	Service Length	RACF specific?	Flag fall for first occasion of service during a visit?*
<b>GENERAL PRACTITIONERS continued</b>								
93423	Review	1	A42	2	Phone*		Yes	No
93287	Additional FPS Session	1	A41	1	Face to face	30-40 mins	Yes	Yes
93288	Additional FPS Session	1	A41	1	Face to face	40+ mins	Yes	Yes
2733	Initial 10 FPS Session	1	A20	2	Face to face	30-40 mins	Yes	Yes
2735	Initial 10 FPS Session	1	A20	2	Face to face	40+ mins	Yes	Yes
2729	Initial FPS Session	1	A20	2	Telehealth (rural and remote area)	30-40 mins	No	No
2731	Initial FPS Session	1	A20	2	Telehealth (rural and remote area)	40+ mins	No	No
91818	Initial FPS Session	1	A40	3	Telehealth*	30-40 mins	No	No
91819	Initial FPS Session	1	A40	3	Telehealth*	40+ mins	No	No
91842	Initial FPS Session	1	A40	10	Phone*	30-40 mins	No	No
91843	Initial FPS Session	1	A40	10	Phone*	40+ mins	No	No
93301	Additional FPS Session	1	A41	1	Telehealth*	30-40 mins	No	No
93304	Additional FPS Session	1	A41	1	Telehealth*	40+ mins	No	No
93302	Additional FPS Session	1	A41	1	Phone*	30-40 mins	No	No

Item number	Service	Category	Group	Sub Group	Mode of service delivery	Service Length	RACF specific?	Flag fall for first occasion of service during a visit?*
<b>GENERAL PRACTITIONERS continued</b>								
93305	Additional FPS Session	1	A41	1	Phone*	40+ mins	No	No
<b>OTHER MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS</b>								
93431	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training not completed)	1	A42	3	Face to face	20-40 mins	Yes	Yes
93432	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training not completed)	1	A42	3	Face to face	40+ mins	Yes	Yes
93433	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed)	1	A42	3	Face to face	20-40 mins	Yes	Yes
93434	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed)	1	A42	3	Face to face	40+ mins	Yes	Yes
93435	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training not completed)	1	A42	3	Telehealth*	20-40 mins	Yes	No
93436	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training not completed)	1	A42	3	Telehealth*	40+ mins	Yes	No
93437	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed)	1	A42	3	Telehealth*	20-40 mins	Yes	No
93438	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed)	1	A42	3	Telehealth*	40+ mins	Yes	No
93439	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training not completed)	1	A42	3	Phone*	20-40 mins	Yes	No
93440	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training not completed)	1	A42	3	Phone*	40+ mins	Yes	No
93441	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed)	1	A42	3	Phone*	20-40 mins	Yes	No
93442	Preparation of MHTP (Mental Health Skills Training completed)	1	A42	3	Phone*	40+ mins	Yes	No
93451	Review	1	A42	4	Face to face		Yes	Yes



Item number	Service	Category	Group	Sub Group	Mode of service delivery	Service Length	RACF specific?	Flag fall for first occasion of service during a visit?*
<b>OTHER MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS continued</b>								
93452	Review	1	A42	4	Telehealth*		Yes	No
93453	Review	1	A42	4	Phone*		Yes	No
93291	Additional FPS Sessions	1	A42	2	Face to face	30-40 mins	Yes	Yes
93292	Additional FPS Sessions	1	A42	2	Face to face	40+ mins	Yes	Yes
941	Initial 10 FPS Session	1	A7	9	Face to face	30-40 mins	Yes	Yes
942	Initial 10 FPS Session	1	A7	9	Face to face	40+ mins	Yes	Yes
371	Initial FPS Session	1	A7	9	Telehealth (rural and remote area)	30-40 mins	No	No
372	Initial FPS Session	1	A7	9	Telehealth (rural and remote area)	40+ mins	No	No
91820	Initial FPS Session	1	A40	3	Telehealth*	30-40 mins	No	No
91821	Initial FPS Session	1	A40	3	Telehealth*	40+ mins	No	No
91844	Initial FPS Session	1	A40	10	Phone*	30-40 mins	No	No
91845	Initial FPS Session	1	A40	10	Phone*	40+ mins	No	No
93307	Additional FPS Session	1	A41	2	Telehealth*	30-40 mins	No	No
93310	Additional FPS Session	1	A41	2	Telehealth*	40+ mins	No	No

Item number	Service	Category	Group	Sub Group	Mode of service delivery	Service Length	RACF specific?	Flag fall for first occasion of service during a visit?*
<b>OTHER MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS continued</b>								
93308	Additional FPS Session	1	A41	2	Phone*	30-40 mins	No	No
93311	Additional FPS Session	1	A41	2	Phone*	40+ mins	No	No
<b>CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGISTS</b>								
93375	Initial Psychological Therapy Session	1	M27	N/A	Face to Face	30-50 mins	Yes	Yes
93376	Initial Psychological Therapy Session	1	M27	N/A	Face to Face	50+ mins	Yes	Yes
80001	Initial Psychological Therapy Session	8	M6	N/A	Telehealth (rural and remote area)	30-50 mins	No	No
80011	Initial Psychological Therapy Session	8	M6	N/A	Telehealth (rural and remote area)	50+ mins	No	No
91166	Initial Psychological Therapy Session	8	M18	1	Telehealth*	30-50 mins	No	No
91167	Initial Psychological Therapy Session	8	M18	1	Telehealth*	50+ mins	No	No
91181	Initial Psychological Therapy Session	8	M18	6	Phone*	30-50 mins	No	No
91182	Initial Psychological Therapy Session	8	M18	6	Phone*	50+ mins	No	No
93312	Additional Psychological Therapy Session	1	M25	N/A	Face to Face	30-50 mins	Yes	Yes
93313	Additional Psychological Therapy Session	1	M25	N/A	Face to Face	50+ mins	Yes	Yes
93331	Additional Psychological Therapy Session	8	M25	N/A	Telehealth*	30-50 mins	No	No

Item number	Service	Category	Group	Sub Group	Mode of service delivery	Service Length	RACF specific?	Flag fall for first occasion of service during a visit?*
<b>CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGISTS continued</b>								
93334	Additional Psychological Therapy Session	8	M25	N/A	Telehealth*	50+ mins	No	No
93332	Additional Psychological Therapy Session	8	M25	N/A	Phone*	30-50 mins	No	No
93335	Additional Psychological Therapy Session	8	M25	N/A	Phone*	50+ mins	No	No
<b>REGISTERED PSYCHOLOGISTS</b>								
93381	Initial FPS Session	1	M28	N/A	Face to Face	20-50 mins	Yes	Yes
93382	Initial FPS Session	1	M28	N/A	Face to Face	50+ mins	Yes	Yes
80101	Initial FPS Session	8	M7	N/A	Telehealth (rural and remote area)	20-50 mins	No	No
80111	Initial FPS Session	8	M7	N/A	Telehealth (rural and remote area)	50+ mins	No	No
91169	Initial FPS Session	8	M18	2	Telehealth*	20-50 mins	No	No
91170	Initial FPS Session	8	M18	2	Telehealth*	50+ mins	No	No
91183	Initial FPS Session	8	M18	7	Phone*	20-50 mins	No	No
91184	Initial FPS Session	8	M18	7	Phone*	50+ mins	No	No
93316	Additional FPS Session	1	M26	1	Face to Face	20-50 mins	Yes	Yes
93319	Additional FPS Session	1	M26	2	Face to Face	50+ mins	Yes	Yes

Item number	Service	Category	Group	Sub Group	Mode of service delivery	Service Length	RACF specific?	Flag fall for first occasion of service during a visit?*
<b>REGISTERED PSYCHOLOGISTS continued</b>								
93351	Additional FPS Session	8	M26	1	Telehealth*	20-50 mins	No	No
93354	Additional FPS Session	8	M26	1	Telehealth*	50+ mins	No	No
93352	Additional FPS Session	8	M26	2	Phone*	20-50 mins	No	No
93355	Additional FPS Session	8	M26	2	Phone*	50+ mins	No	No
<b>OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS</b>								
93383	Initial FPS Session	1	M28	N/A	Face to Face	20-50 mins	Yes	Yes
93384	Initial FPS Session	1	M28	N/A	Face to Face	50+ mins	Yes	Yes
80126	Initial FPS Session	8	M7	N/A	Telehealth (rural and remote area)	20-50 mins	No	No
80136	Initial FPS Session	8	M7	N/A	Telehealth (rural and remote area)	50+ mins	No	No
91172	Initial FPS Session	8	M18	3	Telehealth*	20-50 mins	No	No
91173	Initial FPS Session	8	M18	3	Telehealth*	50+ mins	No	No
91185	Initial FPS Session	8	M18	8	Phone*	20-50 mins	No	No
91186	Initial FPS Session	8	M18	8	Phone*	50+ mins	No	No
93322	Additional FPS Session	1	M26	3	Face to Face	20-50 mins	Yes	Yes

Item number	Service	Category	Group	Sub Group	Mode of service delivery	Service Length	RACF specific?	Flag fall for first occasion of service during a visit?*
<b>OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS continued</b>								
93323	Additional FPS Session	1	M26	3	Face to Face	50+ mins	Yes	Yes
93357	Additional FPS Session	8	M26	3	Telehealth*	20-50 mins	No	No
93360	Additional FPS Session	8	M26	3	Telehealth*	50+ mins	No	No
93358	Additional FPS Session	8	M26	3	Phone*	20-50 mins	No	No
93361	Additional FPS Session	8	M26	3	Phone*	50+ mins	No	No
<b>SOCIAL WORKERS</b>								
93385	Initial FPS Session	1	M28	N/A	Face to Face	20-50 mins	Yes	Yes
93386	Initial FPS Session	1	M28	N/A	Face to Face	50+ mins	Yes	Yes
80151	Initial FPS Session	8	M7	N/A	Telehealth (rural and remote area)	20-50 mins	No	No
80161	Initial FPS Session	8	M7	N/A	Telehealth (rural and remote area)	50+ mins	No	No
91175	Initial FPS Session	8	M18	4	Telehealth*	20-50 mins	No	No
91176	Initial FPS Session	8	M18	4	Telehealth*	50+ mins	No	No
91187	Initial FPS Session	8	M18	9	Phone*	20-50 mins	No	No
91188	Initial FPS Session	8	M18	9	Phone*	50+ mins	No	No

Item number	Service	Category	Group	Sub Group	Mode of service delivery	Service Length	RACF specific?	Flag fall for first occasion of service during a visit?**
<b>SOCIAL WORKERS continued</b>								
93326	Additional FPS Session	1	M26	4	Face to Face	20-50 mins	Yes	Yes
93327	Additional FPS Session	1	M26	4	Face to Face	50+ mins	Yes	Yes
93363	Additional FPS Session	8	M26	4	Telehealth*	20-50 mins	No	No
93366	Additional FPS Session	8	M26	4	Telehealth*	50+ mins	No	No
93364	Additional FPS Session	8	M26	4	Phone*	20-50 mins	No	No
93367	Additional FPS Session	8	M26	4	Phone*	50+ mins	No	No

\*Only available for all aged care residents until 31 March 2021

\*\*Where more than one resident is seen on a single visit to an aged care facility, the flag fall is only available for the first resident seen.