

## Online Consulting Policy

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The delivery of naturopathic healthcare has undergone a significant shift in recent years, but never more than the last year. It is important to take these changes into account to ensure that practitioners are prepared for future practice that may be vastly different from previous generations.

The ANPA defines online or virtual consultations as contact with patients or the provision of services to patients that are not face-to-face or in the physical presence of the patient. These may be facilitated by phone, email, messaging service, webcam or by any other non face-to-face medium.

### GENERAL GUIDELINES:

- Where possible, physical consultations should be conducted as the preferred medium with at least one physical consultation during the treatment period to ensure accurate clinical information.
- When providing services or information by any means other than face-to-face, the absence of a physical assessment/examination means that critical clinical information necessary for safe and efficacious treatment may be unavailable. Practitioners should act within these limitations, including limiting services offered, such as refraining from prescribing medication.
- Any information received from or provided to patients via virtual mediums is to remain confidential and recorded in patient records.
- Patient identity should be confirmed to ensure any information received from or provided to patients via virtual mediums is specific to the relevant patient.
- Patients should be notified that Health Funds as a general rule do not pay benefits for virtual consultations and advised to contact their health fund if they have any questions or require any further information.

### HEALTH FUND CONSIDERATIONS

- Many health Funds have policies outlining their position on virtual and face-to-face consultations. These policies are subject to change, but are outlined in respective health fund's terms and conditions documents which, in many instances, can be accessed from health fund websites.
- Health Funds as a general rule and in many cases as a claims rule, do not pay benefits to their members for consultations or services that are not in the physical presence of a practitioner and in the presence of the patient.
- Where a face-to-face consultation is followed up by an online review consultation, the services are generally regarded by health funds as part of the original face-to-face consultation fee and health funds generally do not pay benefits for non face-to-face follow up services.

- Practitioners who charge patients for follow up services that are not face-to-face should make patients aware that health funds as a general rule and claims rule do not pay benefits for non face-to-face follow up services.
- Follow up consultations that are face-to-face in the presence of a patient are generally regarded as payable benefits by health funds, if conducted within the terms and conditions of the respective health fund.

#### PROFESSIONAL INDEMNITY INSURANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- Professional indemnity insurers may not automatically cover all situations and circumstances regarding online consultations, but may cover some specific circumstances.
- Practitioners should not assume online consultations are covered and additional information may be required by insurers to determine cover.
- Practitioners should contact their insurer to confirm and verify cover for online consultations.