

Media Release

Telehealth Policy improvement is a 'game-changer' for mental health in the bush

The Morrison Government has removed the face-to-face consultation requirements under the Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners initiative through Medicare, taking effect from 1 September 2018. This is an incredible breakthrough for the people of regional, rural and remote Australia.

Previously, three of the ten telehealth psychology sessions were required to take place face-to-face. By removing this requirement, many more Australians in these communities will now be able to easily access Gidget Foundation Australia's Start Talking telehealth program, proving up to ten free perinatal psychology sessions via video call.

Suicide is the leading cause of maternal death in Australia, with rates in country areas increased by a further 40%. The positive impact this change will have on new and expectant parents in the bush, who have suffered for too long with a lack of access to specialist psychologists, will be significant.

Arabella Gibson, CEO of Gidget Foundation Australia said, "People living in regional, rural and remote Australia will no longer experience the inconvenience, time and expense of travelling significant distances to access these services. For some patients, just leaving their home to seek treatment is not possible, with new mothers often facing barriers such as not being able to drive due to the constraints of physical recovery, fatigue and a new baby.

"This policy change will allow Gidget Foundation's Start Talking telehealth service to improve ease of access to, and increase the choice of, perinatal mental health services right across Australia. It is an absolute game-changer for people in the bush," Ms Gibson added.

This practical change allows all psychologists to better service their patients' mental health care needs. It also secures the future of Gidget Foundation's Start Talking program through collaborative funding beyond that of the original pilot.

Dr Vijay Roach, Chairman of Gidget Foundation Australia & President-elect of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) said, "The care of pregnant women and their families goes beyond blood pressure, birth and breastfeeding. We must recognise the inherent value of emotional wellbeing and make mental health care accessible, affordable and universal. There is no health without mental health. By supporting the emotional health of pregnant women and their partners we are helping to grow resilient parents, happier children and stronger communities.

"This announcement recognises the particular needs of families in rural, remote and regional parts of our country, ensuring equity of access to mental health care for all new and expectant Australian women and their families," Dr Roach added.

Minister for Health, the Hon. Greg Hunt said perinatal mental health is of critical importance for new mothers, babies and families.

"From 1 September 2018, Australians experiencing mental health problems, including perinatal anxiety or depression, and who are living in Modified Monash Model Regions 4 – 7 will be able to access Medicare-subsidised psychological consultations via videoconference, without being required to attend any face-to-face sessions," Minister Hunt said.



“This means that new mothers in regional and remote locations will be able to access up to ten Medicare-subsidised allied mental health services per calendar year under the Government’s Better Access program, without needing to travel to attend an appointment in person.

“The Morrison Government is committed to investing in mental health services for all Australians, investing more than \$4 billion annually to improve mental health services. The 2018-19 Federal Budget included an additional \$338.1 million for mental health funding.”

This announcement was released in line with the Government’s Drought Package and lodged with the Federal Register of Legislation on 31 August 2018.

Gidget Foundation Australia’s Start Talking TV Commercial can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/264727302>

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About Gidget Foundation Australia

Gidget Foundation Australia is a national not for profit organisation. The Gidget Foundation exists to promote emotional wellbeing for expectant and new parents and to raise awareness of perinatal depression and anxiety amongst women and their families, their health providers and the wider community to ensure that those in need receive timely, appropriate and supportive care.

The organisation leverages its impact and strengthens its outcomes by working collaboratively with many professionals who support vulnerable parents. All funds raised are directed to its programs, which include:

- Gidget Emotional Wellbeing Screening Program at hospitals
- Gidget House, providing 10 free face to face psychological support sessions for families experiencing emotional distress during pregnancy and early parenthood
- Start Talking, providing free video call psychological support sessions for families experiencing emotional distress during pregnancy and early parenthood
- Education and awareness programs for health professionals and the community
- Advocacy and active memberships of professional networks
- Research and contribution to mainstream and professional publications
- Development and distribution of resources

About Perinatal Depression and Anxiety (PNDA)

Perinatal depression and anxiety and the difficulties of early parenting affects 20% or 1 in 5 new mothers and 10% or 1 in 10 new fathers who will experience some degree of clinically diagnosable mental health illness in association with pregnancy or early parenthood. This equates to over 100,000 new parents every year. Over 50% of new parents will experience adjustment disorders. The cost to the workplace, the family and the community is significant and poorly recognised. Suicide remains the leading cause of maternal death.

Gidget Foundation Australia

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