

# Guide to using telehealth for clinicians during COVID-19



## What is telerehab?

Telehealth is the delivery of care across a distance via information and communication technologies. Telehealth can be used to provide rehabilitation (telerehab). Just like in-person rehabilitation, telerehab can include subjective interviews, patient assessment, goal setting and individualised exercises and rehabilitation tasks. Telerehabilitation can also be used to promote interdisciplinary collaboration between different health professionals.

## Why should I consider using telerehab?

This model of care has multiple advantages, including enabling access to rehabilitation services, reducing practical barriers like travel time and parking, and enabling rehabilitation to take place in the person's own home.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, telerehab can reduce the risk of disease transmission – keeping vulnerable patients, families and clinicians safe. Telerehab is not appropriate when working with patients with potentially serious, high-risk conditions, or those for whom an in-person physical assessment is essential.

## How is telerehab delivered?

There are multiple ways to deliver telerehab, depending on the patient's and clinician's needs, and the technology available.

- › **Telephone:** If you need to monitor your patient's general wellbeing, progress and engagement in an existing rehabilitation programme, then picking up the phone is often the simplest solution. Text messaging (SMS) can also be used to support engagement and provide simple education.
- › **Videoconferencing:** There are lots of advantages to being able to see and hear your patient. Videoconferencing can be used to deliver a more comprehensive rehabilitation programme. For example, to observe function, perform assessments remotely, or to demonstrate and modify rehabilitation exercises. Both business (e.g. Zoom) and telehealth (e.g. CoviU, VSee) platforms may have whiteboard, screen sharing and file sharing functions, which can be useful features in telerehab sessions.

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- › **Email and web-based resources:** If you don't require interaction, consider sharing web-based links, video and PDFs of educational and rehabilitation activities via email or text. It is also possible to quickly develop and share video resources to groups and individual patients.
- › **Telerehabilitation platforms:** There are a number of purpose-built telerehab platforms – see [informme.org.au/telehealth](https://informme.org.au/telehealth)

## Setting up a successful telerehab session with videoconferencing

### Getting technology set up (see [Quick start to videoconferencing](#))

- › Evaluate your (clinician or service) technology resources and needs – see [Purchasing video conferencing devices](#)
- › Select an appropriate location from which to work.
- › Set up and familiarise yourself with your software options – see [Video conference software](#)
- › Test your system (internet connection, audio and video quality, positioning).

### Preparing the patient for the session (see [What is telehealth and is it right for you?](#))

- › Provide information on what technology the patient needs – see [Attending your video consultation: A telehealth guide for patients](#)
- › Make sure you have their phone number in case the video fails.
- › If the patient doesn't feel confident connecting, suggest having a family member assist.

### Preparing as the clinician (see [Communicating effectively online](#))

- › Ensure you have relevant clinical information available.
- › Write a basic plan for the session.
- › Have relevant resources available (i.e., standardised assessments, exercise plans, equipment for demonstration) – see [informme.org.au/telehealth](https://informme.org.au/telehealth)
- › Edit your screen to reduce distractions.

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- › Re-test your system.

## Starting the session

- › Initiate the session by calling or inviting the patient.
- › Check your connection, e.g. "Can you hear me?", "Can you see me?"
- › Confirm that you can see and hear the patient.
- › Optimise the setup with the patient (audio, camera orientation and view, lighting) – see [Attending your video consultation](#)
- › Make introductions.
- › Outline the plan for the session. It is useful to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of communicating by video whilst also acknowledging that challenges can arise.
- › Gain informed consent for the telerehab session – see Guidelines for your association below.

## During the session

- › Model a patient and accepting approach, emphasising that if problems arise they can be addressed.
- › Emphasise your active listening and communicate effectively – see Communication resources below.
- › Regularly check how the session is going.
- › Demonstrating, setting up, cueing and giving feedback in relation to rehabilitation tasks and exercises takes practice from both the patient and the clinician.
- › Inform the patient when you are otherwise occupied (e.g. taking notes or reading something on another screen).

## Closing the session

- › Summarise key points of the session.
- › Highlight follow-up actions to be undertaken and ask the patient if they need anything clarified.
- › Confirm (and record) if the patient is happy to use video again.

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- › To end, tell the patient you're going to close the call, and say goodbye before actually closing the connection.

## Guidelines

- › Occupational Therapy Australia: [Telehealth Guidelines 2020](#)
- › Speech Pathology Australia: [Telepractice in Speech Pathology](#)
- › Australian Physiotherapy Association: [Telehealth Guidelines Response to COVID-19](#)

## Communication resources

- › [Core principles of telehealth communication in 4 minutes](#)
- › [TBIconnect, a program to help people with traumatic brain injury and their family members, friends or carers have better conversations together](#)
- › [Providing online mental health services](#)
- › [Examples of resources for clinicians and clients in video consultations](#)
- › [Allied Health Association of New Zealand telehealth guidelines](#)
- › [Telehealth seminar \(by OTs but relevant across disciplines and contexts\) by Dr Fi Graham](#)
- › [Telehealth seminar \(focused on COVID-19\) by Prof Trish Greenhalgh](#)

## Other resources

- › Australian Telehealth Society, [COVID-19 telehealth guides](#)
- › Centre for Online Health, [Quick guides for telehealth](#)
- › [NZ Telehealth Forum & Resource Centre](#)
- › NSW Agency for Clinical Innovation, [Telehealth: Getting started guide](#)
- › [Telehealth Toolbox](#)
- › NHS, [Video consultation information for GPs](#) (lots of great generic info)
- › Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, [COVID-19: guide for rapid implementation of remote consultations](#)
- › Australian Physiotherapy Association, [Telehealth Q&A webinars](#)