

## SUBMISSION TO THE

### Draft revised *Guidelines: Telehealth consultations with patients*

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## INTRODUCTION

COTA SA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the draft revised *Guidelines: Telehealth consultations with patients*. We engage widely with older South Australians across the state, in person and via phone and email. The lived experiences of the diverse community of older South Australians shape our policy and advocacy work.

COTA SA encourages doctors to consider how offering telehealth appointments makes it easier for older people to independently manage their medical care and access the care they need, including timely prescription requests.

The option to receive medical advice and care via telehealth is especially important for older South Australians who cannot travel easily to a face-to-face appointment due to distance, limited mobility or lack of transportation. Telehealth provides continuity of care which is important to build trust between a health professional and patient and ensures health concerns are addressed in a safe and timely manner.

A patient's choice to receive healthcare in a way that meets their needs is extremely important. Low digital literacy and digital exclusion affect many older Australians and may prevent them from accessing telehealth care. For this cohort of older Australians, access to face-to-face healthcare is vital and solutions to provide this care where barriers exist, such as community transport, doctor shortages and bulk billing, must be addressed.

While it is imperative to consider the impact of digital exclusion for some older Australians, COTA SA emphasises that many older Australians do have the ability to access and use technology with high levels of competency. We take this opportunity to highlight the importance for doctors to not let ageist stereotypes, or assumptions that older people cannot cope with technology, affect their decision-making about whether to offer telehealth to an older person.

## Comments on consultation questions

The content and structure of the draft revised guidelines are clear and relevant. COTA SA makes two suggestions:

- Include in Point 2, “can include a support person where required”
- We are aware of some practices that require a patient to receive a face-to-face appointment within 12 months of a scheduled telehealth appointment. This model can be difficult for older people, particularly with limited mobility, transport options or living in regional areas. COTA SA sees a need to highlight the Medical Board of Australia’s expectations regarding this model of care in the guidelines.

### Who is COTA SA?

COTA SA is an older people's movement run by, for and with older people. We represent the rights, interests and futures of 700,000 older South Australians. COTA SA reflects the diversity of modern ageing in terms of living arrangements, relationships, income, sexuality, culture, health, geography and aspirations. COTA SA connects with thousands of older people each year throughout SA. Our policy and advocacy are guided by the COTA SA Policy Council made up of older South Australians from a diverse range of backgrounds, along with a number of advisory groups. COTA SA’s social enterprise, The Plug-in undertakes regular surveys with older South Australians in addition to its work facilitating access to older people for organisations, researchers and service providers. COTA SA is part of the COTA Federation with independent COTAs in each state and territory along with COTA Australia. The COTA Federation undertake regular State of the Older Nation surveys (2018 and 2021) to understand the views, life experiences and needs of Australians aged 50+.

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### Acknowledgement of Country

*COTA SA acknowledges and respects Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the land of South Australia. We honour Aboriginal peoples’ continuing connection to Country and recognise that their sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to First Nations Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all Aboriginal people.*