



Mental Health Services for Bushfire Response

Last updated: 16 January 2020

- From 17 January 2020, extra mental health services, including telehealth services, are available to people whose mental health is adversely affected by a bushfire that occurred in the 2019-20 financial year.
- The new services are provided by eligible psychologists, GPs and medical practitioners, social workers and occupational therapists.
- The services are available to anyone whose mental health has been affected by the bushfire crisis, and are not restricted to people living in areas directly affected by bushfire.

What are the changes?

From 17 January 2020, two new item groups for mental health treatment items for anyone whose mental health has been affected by bushfire have been added to the MBS. The new groups are:

- **Group A39:** 12 new items, including 4 telehealth items, for GPs and medical providers: MBS items 91721, 91723, 91725, 91727, 91729, 91731, 91283, 91285, 91286, 91287, 91371 and 91372
- **Group M17:** 24 new items, including 8 telehealth items, for:
 - Clinical psychologists: MBS items 91000, 91001, 91005, 91010, 91011 and 91015
 - Eligible psychologists: MBS items 91100, 91101, 91105, 91110, 91111 and 91115
 - Occupational therapists: MBS items 91125, 91126, 91130, 91135, 91136 and 91140
 - Social workers: MBS items 91150, 91151, 91155, 91160, 91161 and 91165

Medicare rebates are available for up to 10 individual mental health services in a calendar year. This quota may consist of any combinations of services.

Patients are not required to have a diagnosed mental health condition, GP mental health treatment plan or referral prior to requesting these services. They may also self-identify as being affected by bushfire and request a service.

Patients wishing to access the services via video conference are not required to have an existing relationship with the treating practitioner. In addition, no minimum distance requirement applies to these video conference services.

Mental health services received under the Bushfire Response do not count against a patient's quota of services under the Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the MBS (Better Access) initiative (for eligible Better Access patients).



Why are the changes being made?

The new mental health services are designed to provide immediate assistance to firefighters, emergency personnel, individuals and communities that are impacted by the ongoing bushfire disaster. They are the second phase of the Australian Government's response to the mental health impact of bushfire, building upon the GP mental health and well-being telehealth services for bushfire-affected patients introduced on 10 January 2020.

What does this mean for providers?

Medical and allied health practitioners will have greater flexibility to provide services to patients whose mental health is affected by bushfire. This includes more accessible telehealth services to overcome disruptions to transport and workforce arrangements.

How will these changes affect patients?

Patients who consider their mental health has been impacted by the bushfire disaster will be able to access essential mental health services anywhere in Australia. They will not be required to have a referral to access the services, and may also self-identify and request a service directly from an eligible practitioner.

Patients who prefer a telehealth service are not required to have an existing relationship with the treating practitioner, and there is no distance restriction on the services. This will support patient access to essential mental health services in communities where bushfire has disrupted normal transport and workforce arrangements.

Who was consulted on the changes?

Due to the nature of the bushfire emergency, it was not reasonably possible to undertake normal consultations with stakeholders prior to the amendment of the MBS items.

How will the changes be monitored and reviewed?

The Department of Health will monitor the use of the new MBS mental health items by medical and allied health practitioners. Use of the items that does not seem to be in accordance with the 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. You can also subscribe to future MBS updates by visiting [MBS Online](#) and clicking 'Subscribe'.

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

Subscribe to '[News for Health Professionals](#)' on the Department of Human Services website and you will 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 Department of Human Services website or contact the Department of Human Services on the Provider Enquiry Line – 13 21 50.

The data file for software vendors is expected to become available on [date] and can be accessed via the MBS Online website under the [Downloads](#) page.

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.