



## DISCUSSION PAPER 2

# INNOVATIVE TREATMENT AND CARE USING IT TECHNOLOGIES

### Background

New technologies bring with them new opportunities to develop innovative ways in which to deliver services. These are particularly relevant to people who reside in rural or remote locations, those house-bound because of physical or mental illness and those who may prefer this as an option, rather than face-to-face consultations with a mental health professional.

### The current situation

Whilst tele-psychiatry has been available for quite some time allowing psychiatrists to assess, manage and consult directly with consumers and mental health staff, there are some difficulties. This is a free services to consumers of the public sector but private psychiatrists delivering this type of service through a private hospital for example, require remuneration for the services they provide.

There are currently no MBS Items specific to telephone service delivery. Neither of these, or any like services, are available under the *Better Access Initiative* for isolated consumers to access psychologists, Mental Health Nurses, Occupational Therapists or Social Workers.

### How do we achieve this ideal?

To ensure appropriate, effective, cost efficient services are delivered in the least restrictive environment to geographically or isolated consumers and to provide support and assistance to their carers, there is an urgent need for an MBS Item to encourage the use of these alternative forms of electronic, internet and telephonic technology.

### Outline of a model

There are a range of technologies currently available that could be used to facilitate the consultation including computer linked 'skype', internet and telephone, whereby the health professional could directly link in real time, with the consumer and/or their carer or family member on a truly face to face basis, regardless of distance.

### What we see as Benefits

- Obviates distance
- Engages in a manner not currently available
- Potentially inspires confidence that advice is immediately available and therefore relieves anxiety and stress.
- Offers the possibility of 24 hour access.

## **What we see as Risks**

- Costs
- Infrastructure costs involved with establishing such services.
- Acceptability by Government
- Potential users deploy the technologies as a defence against seeking advice or assistance.
- Facilities are not used constructively.

## **Principles of Implementation**

- Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing procedures to establish new MBS Item(s)
- Range of technologies required are available in rural and remote areas
- Education and training in their use in order that potential users are familiarised with them?