



# Office of the Chief Psychiatrist

# COVID-19

## Supplementary Guidance for SA Mental Health Services

18 March 2020

Please check this [link](#) for the latest version of this document.

This information supplements any information provided by Local Health Networks to Mental Health Services.

For public health information about COVID-19 please check:

[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019)

### Universal Screening

Prior to a clinical assessment at home or in the clinic, staff should ask current screening questions for COVID-19.

Local Health Networks have circulated information about screening and Personal Protective Equipment to their units.

Videoconference assessment and treatment is an alternative option if clinically appropriate – see over page.

### Social Distancing

Regardless of COVID-19 risks, for all persons seen, practitioners should practice social distancing (including keeping at least 1.5 metres away from others) during interviews and practice hygiene measures (including frequent hand washing, use of hand sanitiser and wiping frequently touched surfaces). More details on social distancing can be read on the web links.

### Education and Prevention

All contacts with clients is an opportunity to provide

1. Public health education and/or an information sheet about Coronavirus prevention
2. Mental health information related to the impacts of Coronavirus (COVID-19).

Paper brochures can be provided, or links to web information provided.

## Video Conferencing

Videoconferencing is an option to be considered:

1. For clients who are in quarantine or self-isolation at home.
2. For clients who have a COVID-19 infection
3. For clients who prefer a videoconference due to anxiety about attending a clinic
4. For any other patient group, as considered clinically appropriate by the practitioner

The strengths and limitations of the modality need to be considered in deciding whether or not to rely on an assessment.

A videoconference interview or therapy session should lead to more engagement and a therapeutic outcome, than a telephone call.

In some situations a videoconference may raise concerns requiring an in person attendance at the person's home or at a clinic.

Videoconferencing to a person's home computer or telephone will be by a commercial application such as FaceTime or Skype.

Currently Digital Health SA security has only recommended the use of FaceTime or Skype in a disaster situation where the benefit and urgency outweighs the risks.

The Office of the Chief Psychiatrist supports the use of this technology at this time.

The following information provides further background: Data history will be held both at the patient, clinician and all the intermediate routing infrastructure. The conversation, however, is reasonably secure with a rare possibility of compromise.

## Telephone Contact

If the above options are not available, telephone can be used if appropriate. Please be aware of the significant limitations of phone assessment and treatment. Such assessments should ideally be structured and of similar duration to face to face assessments.

## Identification of at risk individuals

People who have a physical health co-morbidity associated with their mental illness are at greater risk of the Coronavirus.

It is recommended that:

1. Identification: All such individuals on clinical caseloads are identified.
2. Prioritisation: That these people are prioritised to be phoned or contacted to be provided written and verbal advice about prevention – including hygiene and social distancing.
3. Homelessness: For people who are homeless attempts should be made to arrange short term accommodation. Where accommodation is not available contact can be made with relevant NGO and homelessness services to check on the levels of support and assistance the person is receiving.

4. Supported accommodation: NGOs and other providers are receiving advice. Staff may identify situations where they may recommend to providers that they seek advice.

For COVID 19 Fact Sheets and Posters

[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/healthy+living/protecting+your+health/preventing+disease+and+infection/wash+wipe+cover/wash+wipe+cover+resources](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/healthy+living/protecting+your+health/preventing+disease+and+infection/wash+wipe+cover/wash+wipe+cover+resources)

For COVID 19 and mental health resources for consumers:

<https://www.chiefpsychiatrist.sa.gov.au/news/coronavirus-covid-19-and-mental-health>

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## For more information

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