

PREPARING FOR TELEPRACTICE

Fams has pulled together tips from a range of sources to help you implement good practice in telepractice.

This document is designed to assist organisations and workers by providing an overview of factors to be considered when commencing service delivery via telepractice. Please note: the information in this document is of a general nature only and may not be relevant to or apply to your individual circumstances.

In considering your need and capacity to deliver telepractice services you need to take into account both organisation and client competence.

Organisation competence	Client competence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology • Ethics • Privacy • Confidentiality • Quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology • Consent • Privacy • Safety • Sensory

Be strategic in your considerations:

- What are the needs of individuals served by your organisation?
- Work with your team to think strategically about where opportunities for expanding telepractice are.
- Which services/programs already have telepractice options that could be expanded? Which populations or clients would most easily adapt to virtual platforms, and which services or populations would pose the greatest challenges?

Technology:

- Take time to assess your needs: understand what your current capacity is and where your gaps are in terms of equipment, staffing and client resources.
- Ask yourself:
 - What technology capacities do you already have?
 - What hardware will you and/or clients need: headsets, webcams, tablets, ethernet cables, smartphones?
 - What software will you and/or clients need: consider the necessary functionality such as: screen sharing and recording; ease of use; reliability; capacity; privacy and security. What network capacity do you have? Are internet connections wired or wireless and how will this affect performance and speed? What are the data limits and cost implications?
 - What equipment could you purchase quickly?
 - Who on your staff could be a leader in utilising technology and training other staff?
 - What technology capacities can you guestimate clients have/need?
- Whatever application you decide to use, practice with other staff before you use with a client. You may be able to recommend preferred video conferencing applications to clients and send them test links to make sure a connection is available before starting your session.

Staff:

- What training and resources will staff require?
- Consider the impact telepractice will have on staff wellbeing. What supports will be required for staff if working remotely?
- Are systems in place for debriefing? How will you ensure staff have access to a supervisor when required?
- Are mechanisms in place to monitor and maintain quality assurance? How will staff be supervised? Will client consent be required if sessions are recorded or observed?

Communicate with your clients:

- What do you need to know from your clients or community? How can you consult with clients to have their voices heard in program development and decision making?

- How will you let clients know about your organisation's telepractice policies (including during a disaster or sudden cessation of face-to-face services such as during a COVID19 outbreak)? If you will only be providing telepractice services, post information to your website, consider changing your organisation's phone script to include this information at the beginning of recorded messages, call clients with upcoming appointments and offer telepractice. Consider targeted outreach to "high risk" clients.

Documentation and record keeping:

- Ensure all telepractice practice is consistent and compliant with existing policies for record keeping, information management and data protection.
- Do you need to update client consent forms for telepractice?
- Are systems in place to continue maintaining an electronic record for each client and documents to the highest capability based on your interaction, including any assessments or support plans?
- How will you ensure your staff are kept abreast of policy changes so that records are compliant?

Environment

- Can you ensure places that are quiet, private and secure, and free from interruption are available for sessions?
- Consider the room background and environment beyond your video. Do all staff, including those working from home have a professional and depersonalised space? If working from an office, are there posters, notes, files, whiteboards or organisational documents visible that you would not have in a client room? Specifically, is information visible that may breach data governance guidelines or, if working from home, the location or identity of other members of the household.

Consider appropriate screening tools:

- Are existing screening tools sufficient for telepractice? Do you need to introduce new screening questions to ensure the safety of clients during sessions? How will family members or support persons participate?
- What risk management strategies are required for vulnerable clients, for example where there may be violence in the home? Do you need to establish safe words with clients?

Create a backup plan:

- Consider establishing protocols in case escalation of care is required.
- What processes are in place if technology fails? What backup technology or other modalities could you use?

Technology in session:

- Establish systems and procedures to support staff in maintaining equipment and technology, for example, ensuring all devices are kept fully charged and functioning.
- Ensure staff are familiar with the technology and conduct a test session. Are staff skilled enough to provide clients with training and support?
- Are there tests you could do beforehand to check their internet or phone connection?

Engagement:

- Consider how establishing rapport with clients may be different online. Do staff have the necessary skills and support? What additional resources may they need?
- Are telepractice services culturally safe and accessible for all client cohorts including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, clients from diverse backgrounds, and clients with a disability?
- Develop tips to support staff to use best practice in delivering telepractice, for example, position the camera to help maximise eye contact.

Review:

- Develop processes to check in with staff and clients regularly. Find out where the trouble areas are and make changes where necessary. Did they struggle with this type of communication? Could you switch to a different application?
- See the self-evaluation checklist on our website as a tool to assess the effectiveness of your session.