

A retrospective review of a phone service for sexual and reproductive health

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Background:

Telehealth is the remote delivery of healthcare through telecommunication tools. To support access to healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic, in March 2020 the Australian government announced temporary Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items for telehealth/phone services. In addition to face-to-face consultations, Family Planning NSW (FPNSW) introduced phone consultations in April 2020 to ensure that access to essential sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services was not compromised. Phone consultations were provided for contraception, gynaecological problems, pregnancy options counselling, termination of pregnancy (TOP) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). A study was undertaken to explore the implementation and impact of phone services for SRH.

Methods:

FPNSW clinical data collected between April and July 2020 were reviewed to describe the use of phone services for SRH.

Results:

There were 1,945 phone consults utilising the temporary MBS items, accounting for 20% of total consultations provided by FPNSW clinics over this time. The main presenting issues focused on contraception (38%), gynaecological problems (31%), TOP (12%), STIs (9%) and pregnancy/fertility (6%). Most phone service users were young people <30 years (56%), English-speaking (85%), from a major city (89%), and with a full-time/part-time job (53%). Young people were more likely to use phone consults than face-to-face for the same presenting issue(s).

Conclusion:

The high use of phone consultations by FPNSW clients for a range of issues suggests this may be a feasible and acceptable option for many SRH services. Utilising telehealth as a complement to face-to-face consultations has ensured access to these services during the pandemic, and continued provision will likely further enhance SRH care.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.