

A Guide to Using Telehealth

General information when assessing a client for mobility and seating solutions.

A document produced by Enable New Zealand.

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An introduction

This document pulls together some practical and useful tips we have discovered when providing housing and wheelchair and seating outreach appointments via Telehealth.

The Enable New Zealand outreach teams have been providing Telehealth services for a number of years, primarily when we have been faced with cancelled flights, last minute changes to travel plans or when clients are needing to be seen in some of the far reaching areas of the Enable New Zealand regions.

The information provided in this guide is based on our experience using Telehealth and we hope you find it useful for your own practice.



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What is Telehealth?

Telehealth can be defined as a clinical application of consultative preventative, diagnostic and therapeutic services via two-way telecommunication technology.

During COVID-19, Telehealth is a critical way that providers can reduce risk while maintaining contact with their clients.

All wheelchair and seating assessments that require the delivery of equipment or adjustment/modification to existing equipment by a therapist, subcontractor or supplier external to the client's 'bubble,' will still need to meet the Ministry of Health's 'essential' criteria during COVID-19 restrictions.

Telehealth appointments are generally held for reviews or follow-ups and more often than not will have a local therapist, subcontractor and or supplier involved.

Telehealth sessions for initial equipment assessments, especially wheelchair and seating where measurements and a physical assessment is required, is not ideal but can occur during the COVID-19 restrictions.

Considerations for Telehealth

Confidentiality and privacy:

- All standard confidentiality and privacy policies apply from both your DHB, business policies and your Professional body. DHBs may have guidelines for use of social media and electronic communication. Please ensure you are familiar with these.
- Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy Code of Ethics includes protecting the confidential nature of consumer information, demonstrating privacy and respect for the client and ensuring all care is taken to maintain the confidentiality of records including electronic communication. Please ensure you are familiar with these. There is a link to this Code in the Useful Resources section.
- The 'Guidelines for Social Media and other Electronic Communication for Occupational Therapists' was created by the Occupational Therapy Board. This document sits alongside the Occupational Therapy Code of Conduct and both can be found on the OT board of New Zealand's website. (Link to this is available in the Useful Resources section.)

Consent:

- Ensure you obtain informed consent from all parties before commencing with Telehealth as an option.
- Explain how Telehealth works and the process for this, note your copy of informed consent in clients notes/file.
- If you are recording and keeping any information, this also needs a separate informed consent, which needs to be located in the client notes/files. Check your local DHB policy on this.

First steps

- Work out what technology and connectivity they have at home e.g. smartphones, tablets, home computer, camera, home phone. Does the client have Wi-fi (how much), data (how much) and/or a telephone connection.
- Work out what Telehealth platform will work for you and the client i.e. Zoom, FaceTime, Skype, speaker phone, email.

Technology options

What technology is your client currently using for communication with family and friends?

- Do they send photos to family and friends now? If so how?
- Do they use email? Can they email photos?
- Do they have access to and use a speaker phone (so can be hands free for measurements etc. or so others can join in on the conversation)?
- Do they participate in video conferencing with friends and family, if so, what platforms do they use?
- How comfortable are they with technology?

Some clients may not be familiar with this technology for communication, and it can be stressful to learn new technology (if you as an Assessor are not in the client's home). It may be helpful to find out if there is an essential health worker or key family member entering the client's home during COVID-19 lockdown, who may be able to assist with any Telehealth method of communication. An Assessor may be able to time the appointments accordingly.

Practice

Once a Telehealth delivery method has been chosen, a practice session is required by both the client and the Assessor to ensure you both know how to use it and that the camera and microphone are working.

Preparation for your Telehealth sessions

Work out what essential information you need to gain from the session before it starts. What information do you already know and what information do you need to find out to provide a mobility and or seating solution. You can email or communicate information you require to the client and their family beforehand so they can prepare it for you.

Useful equipment

The following is a list of equipment we would recommend for wheelchair and seating and other equipment assessments:

- Camera
- Tape measure
- Current wheelchair
- Pen and paper to write measurements on
- Static chair either with arms or without arms (depending on their sitting balance) if they do not have a wheelchair yet

General tips for Telehealth sessions

The most ideal Telehealth tool for wheelchair and seating appointments is a portable device i.e. smartphone or tablet. This is so whomever is holding the portable device can move around the home and/or wheelchair. This enables them to show the Assessor the client's posture from different angles and/or the home environment, inside and outside.

- Prepare – summarise the key items to cover in your Telehealth session
- Define roles: who will do the measuring, recording and taking notes
- Telehealth will work only as well as your connection. If you have a good Wi-fi or data connection, the apps/programmes will work smoothly. You may experience some lag from time to time, but it usually lasts just a few seconds.
- Clean the camera lens on the front of your device to remove any fingerprints or smudges, preferably with a microfiber cloth.
- You can switch on airplane mode to prevent any calls or interruptions while filming. You can still access Wi-Fi while on airplane mode.
- Check your battery level before starting and have a charger ready if required.
- Avoid too much background noise, bright lights or the sun facing the camera, overly active or "busy" shots.
- Be aware how big your screen is and therefore how much or how little the recipient can see.

Assessment and measurements for wheelchair and seating using Telehealth for a client that does not yet have a wheelchair in place

The purpose of this stage is measuring and recording only. The translation into equipment can happen at a later time.

Ask the client to sit on solid surface if they have the sitting balance and capabilities to allow this. Suggestions for this include:

- Kitchen/dining chair with or without arms (without arms is easier to measure if sitting balance allows)

- Bathroom equipment such as shower stool with or without arms, commode chair or shower commode chair.
- Children can be assessed on lower surfaces such as coffee table etc. (if cultural beliefs allow)
- Lazy boy or static armchair with arms for clients who cannot sit on a solid surface and do not have sitting balance.
- Safety comes first and if the client has limited balance, have someone standing behind them.

Considerations during assessment

- Ensure client is sitting upright as much as they can for the measurements, this may involve someone supporting them or the use of a pillow behind their back.
- Take into account any sag or worn upholstery of the chair they are sitting in during the measurements.
- If you have consent from the client, you can take a photo of the scene to use later when transferring your measurements into equipment parameters.
- The same person should take the measurements throughout the whole assessment for consistency
- A steel retractable tape measure is better than a fabric sewing one for accuracy of measurements.

Essential client measurements to transfer into equipment parameters

- Hip width, or widest point.
- Thigh depth. Note if there is a difference between left and right.
- Lower leg length. Hold the tape under the thigh and measure to under the client's foot. Leave the shoes on if the client will be wearing them in the chair.
- Shoulder height. Note if there are different shoulder heights and measure to scapular height if self-propelling.

Functional measurements that can be assessed from the sitting surface

- Before you start the session, ask the person who is taking the measurements to measure the width and depth of the chosen surface as this gives an indication of the wheelchair size required.

- Transfer height if this is critical for sit to stand. Does the seat to floor height of the surface they are sitting on work well? If not, does the height need to increase or decrease and if so by how much. This is where a shower stool can be useful as you can adjust the legs.
- Seat to floor height if required for someone using his or her foot to punt a wheelchair.

Assessment and measurements for wheelchair and seating using Telehealth for a client that does have a wheelchair in place

- Always measure the client in the wheelchair if they have one.
- The most important client measurements and considerations are the same as above and if possible remove the arm supports for ease of measuring.

Functional measurements that can be assessed from the sitting surface

- The functional considerations are the same as above with the addition of foot support height, i.e. measurement from top of seat pan, or front seat rail to the top of the foot support.

Useful pictures to take

- Take a picture of the client sitting from anterior (front), posterior (back), laterally side view and superior (top down over the head) if possible.

Useful resources

Occupational Therapy code of ethics

https://www.otboard.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/CodeofEthics_April2015-1.pdf

Physiotherapy code of ethics

https://www.physioboard.org.nz/sites/default/files/NZ_Physiotherapy_Code_of_Ethics_with_commentary_FINAL_0.pdf

OTBNZ guidance on the use of Telehealth

<https://www.otboard.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Telehealth-guidelines-Final.pdf>

Guidelines for social media and other electronic communication for Occupational Therapist

<https://www.otboard.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Guidelines-for-Social-Media-and-Electronic-Communication.pdf>

Resources with information on privacy and confidentiality

www.telehealth.org.nz

<https://www.telehealth.org.nz/regulations-and-policies/privacy-and-confidentiality/>

<https://www.telehealth.org.nz/assets/tech/170821-NZTRC-risk-management-when-using-skype.pdf>

www.healthnavigator.org.nz , <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/t/telehealth-what-is-it/#video>

www.hinz.org.nz

<https://zoom.us/docs/en-us/COVID-19.html>

New Zealand Telehealth Forum and Resource Centre has provided guidance on telehealth provision for health providers, this information can be found on the below link.

[NZ telehealth resource centre](#)

Fiona Graham, Pauline Boland, Rebecca Grainger & Sally Wallace (2019): Telehealth delivery of remote assessment of wheelchair and seating needs for adults and children: a scoping review, Disability and Rehabilitation, DOI: 10.1080/09638288.2019.1595180

Waugh, K. & Crane, B. A. (2018). Standardized measures of the person, seating system, and wheelchair. In M.L. Lange & J. L. Mickle (Eds.), *Seating and mobility: A clinical resource guide* (pp. 121-137). New York: Slack Incorporated.

Video clip on how to make a good video

https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1GCEA_enNZ890NZ890&q=how+to+make+a+video+on+my+phone&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjD3IH9bHoAhVLzDqGHZU6AVAQ1QIoAXoECAsQAq&biw=1920&bih=937#kpvalbx=_7V15Xq_OOpWd4-EPqYOj-A448

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