

COVID-19's Impact on Medical Incomes

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Feeling the pinch – COVID-19 impact revealed in survey of doctors

"The pandemic and its consequences have accelerated a number of pre-existing trends in the healthcare sector and among the medical workforce, including increased use of telehealth and lower growth in the use of private medical care."

"These changes can also be seen as offering new opportunities to improve the delivery of medical care in Australia.

"As everyone adjusts to the ongoing challenges caused by the pandemic, we will begin to see how these changes can benefit patients and influence the quality, costs and access to healthcare in the future."¹

A May 2020 study by the University of Melbourne, led by Professor Anthony Scott ([Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research](#)) sought to explore the impact of COVID-19 on the medical workforce. As expected, although the health system in Australia had not been overwhelmed in stage one of the pandemic, GPs and non-GP specialists have experienced significant changes in workload and income since the beginning of the pandemic. The study examined "the short-term effects on doctors' working patterns and mental health, how doctors have responded and how they have been supported during the pandemic."²

Over 2000 GPs and other specialists completed the Medicine in Australia: Balancing Employment and Life (MABEL) COVID-19 Online Survey. One of the key findings of the survey highlighted the fact that Medicare-funded telehealth consultations comprised 36% of all consultations with the majority of those consultations conducted via telephone rather than video in April 2020.

These statistics raised potential concerns regarding the effectiveness, the quality and continuity of care without video consultations. The survey also indicated that of the 36% of telehealth consultations most were likely to be conducted in wealthier areas or within larger practices as opposed to areas that were more disadvantaged.

Loss of income was also another aspect reported on in the survey with 20% of GPs and 42% of other specialists reporting a 30% drop, with 20% of surgeons and anaesthetists reporting a loss of 50% or more in income.

Another detail reported in the findings of the survey was that a number of doctors interviewed were undergoing moderate to high levels of financial stress with 33.6% in urban areas and 23.8% in rural settings.

And although, those practising in more affluent areas were hardest hit financially, only 30% reported feeling financially stressed compared to 27.6% of their counterparts in more disadvantaged areas.

Other key areas covered in the study were:

- Variation in workload for GPs, and more consistent falls for non-GP specialists
- Doctors supported by colleagues, but lack of protective equipment increases stress
- Changes to practice organisation and increases in bulk billing and
- The future

To ease some of the stresses facing MIPS members, you have access to resources that can assist with guidelines on telehealth, practice and employees, financial wellbeing and other frequently asked questions. See how [MIPS is assisting members during COVID-19](#).

[View the full report](#)

^{1&2}. [COVID-19 and the medical workforce: report shows loss of income and potential new ways of working](#)
