

PATIENTS AUSTRALIA

2026–27 Pre- Budget Submission

to the Commonwealth
Department of Treasury



Patients Australia welcomes the opportunity to inform the funding priorities of the 2026-27 Budget.

About Patients Australia

Patients Australia is an independent, not-for-profit organisation advocating for accessible, affordable, and patient-centred care. Through patient voice research, partnerships, and advocacy, we amplify the voices of patients in national health reform conversations and work to ensure lived experience informs system design and innovation.

Key Contact Information

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Executive Summary

Patients Australia, a national peak body representing the rights and interests of Australian patients, welcomes the opportunity to submit this pre-budget proposal seeking Commonwealth support for the implementation and evaluation of Self-Accredited Australian Telehealth Safety and Quality Standards.

The Australian Telehealth Standards Consortium, convened by Patients Australia and chaired by Richard Skimin, brings together organisations from across the health system, including Healthdirect; insurers Medibank, HCF, and Bupa; and telehealth and digital health innovators nib Group's Honeysuckle Health, Updoc, Eucalyptus, Healthengine, MedAdvisor, MOSH, Medmate, 13Sick, and Wesfarmers Health.

Together with input shared from a range of patient organisation and industry consultation partners, the consortium is developing a nationally consistent, patient-led framework to improve trust, safety, and accountability in virtual care.

The standards will be launched in early 2026. Patients Australia now seeks \$860,000 over two years (2026–27 and 2027–28) to support:

- Development of a national self-accreditation model for telehealth providers based on the new standards.
- Pilot testing with providers across multiple service types and jurisdictions.
- Development of software to administer the self-accreditation
- An independent implementation evaluation conducted by a university partner to ensure rigour, transparency, and long-term adoption.

This investment will strengthen patient protection, support telehealth sector maturity, and give government confidence in a model that promotes quality improvement without adding unnecessary regulatory burden.

The implementation and evaluation of Self-Accredited Australian Telehealth Safety and Quality Standards.

Overview

Telehealth now delivers millions of consultations each year, yet there is still no dedicated quality or accreditation framework to guide provider conduct, data management, or clinical governance specific to virtual care.

The Australian Telehealth Standards Consortium's Telehealth Safety and Quality Standards have been developed through extensive patient consultation and cross-sector collaboration, and address this gap. The next phase – implementation – requires co-designing and piloting a self-accreditation process that telehealth providers can adopt voluntarily, supported by independent evaluation and transparent reporting.

This proposal builds directly on the work of the Australian Telehealth Standards Consortium, which has developed Australia's first patient-led telehealth standards, scheduled for public release in early 2026.

Rationale

Telehealth has become a permanent and essential part of healthcare delivery, yet there is currently no nationally endorsed accreditation or compliance mechanism to ensure patient safety,

data protection, and clinical quality across the rapidly expanding sector.

As digital health services diversify, there is an urgent need for an accessible, scalable, and transparent model that complements regulatory oversight while supporting providers to demonstrate quality and accountability.

Drawing on lessons from established frameworks such as the RACGP's Standards for General Practice, Patients Australia proposes a self-accreditation system that is collaborative, evidence-based, and patient-centred. This will include structured self-assessment tools, verification processes, and continuous improvement cycles aligned to the Telehealth Standards.

Self-regulation offers significant cost and efficiency advantages over other forms of regulation for the telehealth sector. It avoids the substantial public expenditure required to create and maintain new compliance and enforcement infrastructure, while reducing administrative burden for providers who would otherwise navigate complex statutory requirements. By leveraging industry expertise and resources to drive quality improvement, self-accreditation provides a practical and timely pathway to safeguard patient safety without slowing innovation or increasing public expenditure.

In this context, a national self-accreditation model represents the most efficient, cost-effective, and patient-centred mechanism to embed the new Telehealth Safety and Quality Standards across the sector. With Commonwealth support, the model can be implemented quickly, tested rigorously, and scaled nationally to strengthen patient protection and system-wide trust in virtual care.

Proposed Funding

Patients Australia seeks \$860,000 over two years to design, implement, and evaluate the model, including:

- Develop a self-accreditation framework and online platform for telehealth providers.
- Pilot the framework with a representative group of providers across different service types and jurisdictions.
- Commission an independent implementation evaluation through a university partner.
- Conduct national stakeholder engagement and dissemination activities to encourage uptake and alignment across the sector.

Implementation Plan

Phase 1 (Mar–Aug 2026): Co-design and framework development with stakeholders

Phase 2 (Sep 2026–Feb 2027): Pilot testing with approximately 20 telehealth providers nationwide

Phase 3 (Mar–Sep 2027): Evaluation, refinement, and national dissemination

Expected Outcomes

- Establishment of an evidence-based, patient and industry endorsed self-accreditation model aligned with the Telehealth Safety and Quality Standards
- Increased patient trust and transparency across the telehealth sector
- Improved safety and quality assurance processes for both new and existing providers
- Stronger alignment between patient expectations, clinical governance, and digital innovation

Alignment with Government Priorities

This initiative supports Commonwealth priorities to:

- Strengthen digital health infrastructure and patient safety.
- Reduce pressure on in-person healthcare through high-quality virtual care.
- Improve data protection and consumer confidence in telehealth.
- Promote innovation and efficiency in healthcare delivery.

Conclusion

This initiative offers government a cost-effective pathway to strengthen telehealth governance without imposing additional regulatory burden. By funding this work, the Department of Health and Aged Care can enable Patients Australia and the Australian Telehealth Standards Consortium to deliver the next critical step, turning agreed national standards into practical, measurable, and sustainable improvement in virtual care safety and quality.

Leading stakeholders and industry experts from the following organisations support the recommendations in this submission:



18 Month Budget

Cost Category	Description	Amount
Project Management & Coordination	Leadership, governance, and reporting. Design of self-accreditation tools and provider guidance	\$250,000
Digital Platform Development	Build of secure online accreditation platform	\$180,000
Grant to be administered for Independent Evaluation (University Partner grant recipient)	Evaluation design, ethics approval, analysis, and reporting	\$200,000
Stakeholder Engagement & Communications	Provider engagement, consultations, and launch activities	\$90,000
Governance & Advisory Group	Oversight by consortium representatives	\$60,000
Administrative & Contingency Costs	Operational support and 10% contingency	\$80,000
Total		\$860,000



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