

Alkimos Family Practice

Communication Policy – Telephone Calls & Electronic Communications

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all communication between the practice, patients, carers, and third parties via telephone and electronic methods is safe, effective, professional, and timely.

This policy also provides guidance on the conduct of telephone consultations, including how patients can access them, in line with RACGP Standards, privacy legislation, and patient safety requirements.

Policy

1. Alkimos Family Practice is committed to providing accessible communication for patients via telephone and approved electronic methods.
2. All communications must protect patient confidentiality and comply with the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*, *Australian Privacy Principles*, and relevant WA health legislation.
3. Telephone consultations are available for appropriate clinical matters and will be conducted only by registered medical practitioners.
4. Urgent or emergency matters will not be managed via electronic communication or routine telephone consultations. Patients will be directed to dial 000 in emergencies.
5. Staff must use professional, respectful communication at all times and follow practice protocols for message-taking, documentation, and escalation.

Procedures

Telephone Calls

- Reception staff will answer incoming calls promptly (within 3–5 rings where possible) using a standard greeting.
- Caller identity will be confirmed before discussing or disclosing personal health information. 3 points of ID will be confirmed before moving forward with the call.
- All messages for clinical staff must be documented in the clinical software, including date, time, caller details, and reason for call.
- Messages requiring clinical review will be flagged to the treating doctor or nurse according to urgency.
- Non-urgent administrative queries will be addressed by reception or practice management staff.

Electronic Communications (Email, SMS, Patient Portal)

- Only practice-approved secure systems (e.g., encrypted email, clinical software messaging, SMS reminders) may be used.
- Sensitive clinical information will not be sent via unsecured email unless the patient has provided written consent.
- SMS may be used for appointment reminders, recalls, and non-sensitive notifications only.
- Incoming patient emails will be checked daily and acknowledged within 3 business days.
- All patient-related communications must be documented in the clinical record.

Telephone Consultations

- Patients may request a telephone consultation by contacting reception or booking online (if appointments are available).
- Reception staff will confirm eligibility (e.g., patient must have attended a face-to-face consultation within the last 12 months for Medicare eligibility).
- Reception staff call the patient the day of their telephone consultation prior to the doctor calling to obtain payment and a Medicare rebate is processed after the consultation, should the patient be eligible.
- The doctor will call the patient as close to the scheduled time using a practice-registered phone line.
- Identity verification must occur before the consultation begins (e.g., patient full name, DOB, address).
- Clinical notes will be documented as per a standard face-to-face consultation.
- Where physical examination or urgent review is required, the patient will be asked to attend in person or directed to emergency services.
- Billing will be processed in line with Medicare requirements (e.g., item 91801 or equivalent).
- Should a refund be required, reception will phone the patient and promptly process the refund for the patient in the same way the payment was made.
- Should the patient fail to attend the telephone consultation, a did not attend (DNA) fee will apply and this fee is payable before their next appointment.



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Patient Access Information

Patients may access the practice through the following methods:

- **Telephone:** Reception is available during opening hours for appointments, enquiries, and urgent clinical messages.
- **Electronic Communication:** Appointment reminders, recalls, and certain notifications may be sent via SMS or secure email. Reception will request consent from patients to set them up for electronic communications, this is also noted on the patient registration form. Patients should inform reception if they do not wish to receive electronic communication.
- **Telephone Consultations:** Available by appointment for eligible patients. Bookings can be made via phoning the practice or online. Patients must provide payment prior to the consultation, a reliable contact number and be available at the scheduled time.
- **Emergencies:** Patients are advised to call **000** for urgent or life-threatening situations.

Review & Compliance

This policy will be reviewed annually by the practice manager in consultation with clinical staff.

Policy Review

Created: August 2025

Next Review August 2026