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NEW RULE TO PROTECT TELEHEALTH PATIENTS

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Chronic fatigue sufferer Kayla Miladinovic, with her mother Karen, has benefited from telehealth services. Picture: Matt Turner.

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POP-UP telehealth clinics that make it easier for people to shop around for medication have in part led to a new rule to safeguard patients.

But some vulnerable patients say it is a barrier to health care that will cause them unnecessary pain.

More than 640,000 patients in SA have received at least one Medicare telehealth service, following changes triggered by COVID-19.

On July 20, a new rule was introduced as part of a government wind back of some telehealth services expanded in March to stop the spread of the virus. Under the reform, telehealth services are only available to patients who have seen the practitioner, or a doctor from the same practice, for a face-to-face service in the past 12 months. Some exemptions apply.

Australian Medical Association state president Dr Chris Moy said the lack of telehealth restrictions had led to opportunistic behaviour by some telehealth-only pop-up clinics.

"For example, a patient who requests addictive medications might be more likely to obtain it this way because the whole thrust of the model is for the individual to get the medication so that the pharmacy can make a profit," he said.

Kayla Miladinovic, who suffers from a chronic fatigue disorder, said telehealth services had improved her

quality of life since COVID-19. She said a round trip to her health specialist in Blackwood resulted in two days of bed rest. "(Telehealth) also means more energy and less pain for me," she said.

Flinders University Caring Futures

Institute researcher Dr Maria Alejandra Pinero de Plaza said telehealth services must continue for those who are homebound. She is leading research on the experiences of Australia's homebound population.