

KEY ACTIONS
for accrediting agencies
and general practices

Conducting hybrid assessments

National General Practice Accreditation Scheme

This fact sheet outlines the processes and best practice requirements for accrediting agencies and general practices participating in hybrid assessments under the [NGPA Scheme](#).

A hybrid assessment is where an assessment is conducted to standards, with at least one assessor on site and at least one assessor participating virtually.

A hybrid assessment for general practices may be approved by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) in exceptional circumstances.

The role, responsibilities, and processes of the on-site assessor is the same as for a fully on-site assessment. The role, responsibilities, and processes of the accreditation agency and general practice participating virtually are outlined below.

When can a hybrid assessment be conducted?

A hybrid assessment may be conducted in exceptional circumstances where:

- There is restricted access to all or part of the general practice due to public health orders, natural disasters, or similar restrictions
- The safety of patients and assessors is a probable risk
- An on-site assessment has commenced but cannot be completed as patients, practice staff or assessors are at probable risk.

A hybrid assessment cannot be conducted where:

- It is to assess a general practice operating without dedicated physical premises (see [Conducting virtual assessments under the NGPA Scheme](#))
- A significant risk was reported at initial assessment (see [Advisory GP18/04: Notification of significant risk](#))
- The privacy of patient information or the assessment outcomes, security of data and discussions, due process, or impartiality cannot be guaranteed
- The availability, connectivity, or performance of relevant technology required for assessment is limited.

Technical requirements for a hybrid assessment

A variety of information and communications technology (ICT) tools are required to conduct assessments, including but not limited to:

- Teleconferencing, particularly where sound quality is an issue with videoconferencing, or to communicate if other technologies are not functioning adequately. However, teleconferencing should not replace videoconferencing.
- Video conferencing, with screen sharing capability, such as Zoom, Webex, and Microsoft Teams. Note that using the general practice's preferred platform may reduce issues with firewalls and facilitate ease of use for the general practice.
- Documents and records review by virtual access, either synchronously in real time or asynchronously using secure platforms and filesharing services such as Microsoft Teams, SharePoint, and Dropbox.

Requirements for hybrid assessments

- ✓ Accrediting agencies must seek approval from the Commission prior to conducting a hybrid assessment using this [form](#)
- ✓ Accrediting agencies and assessors must comply with the requirements of the NGPA Scheme and ensure the assessment processes are rigorous
- ✓ Whenever a hybrid assessment is conducted, at least one member of the assessment team is to be on site for the majority of the assessment
- ✓ Assessors must take all necessary steps to ensure the assessment process is robust and the integrity of the assessment is not compromised
- ✓ All relevant areas within the general practice must be viewed and assessed including interactions with patients, with their permission
- ✓ Assessors must clearly document in the general practice assessment report the reason that a hybrid assessment was performed, the locations that were assessed virtually, and note any barriers or technical difficulties encountered during the assessment
- ✓ Assessors are to keep records of the areas, indicators or Standards that were solely assessed virtually.

Accrediting agencies and general practices should refer to the guidance provided in **Attachment 1** when proceeding with a hybrid assessment.

Questions?

For more information, please visit the [NGPA webpage](#) on the Commission's website.

You can also email the Safety and Quality Advice Centre at AdviceCentre@safetyandquality.gov.au or call 1800 304 056

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Guidance on conducting hybrid assessments

Prior to a hybrid assessment

Administration

Accrediting agency

- The agency is to consider:
 - The need for a virtual tour of the general practice at the commencement of the assessment for the online assessor
 - Time zones for assessors and the general practice when scheduling the assessment
 - ICT platform(s) to be used to communication with general practices during the assessment
 - Identifying the practice contact person should issues arising during the assessment
 - How patients are to be involved in the assessment.
- Assessment team members are to:
 - Know and understand their roles and responsibilities for the assessment
 - Have the skills and/or the support to use the ICT equipment
 - Understand the risks and limitations of virtual assessments, and work to minimise these, particularly in relation to evidence gathering, the robustness of the assessment and privacy and data security issues.
- Ensure sufficient time is allocated to testing of ICT equipment prior to the virtual assessment, using the same equipment that will be used during the assessment, and in areas where the assessment will be conducted
- Identify the mechanism assessors will use to keep in contact during the assessment, such as phone and group chat. Ensure the mechanism is secure at all times and that the record of the conversations can be fully deleted at the end of the assessment
- Develop a contingency plan, that includes actions and responsibilities for situations including when:
 - Video link is disconnected
 - Voice link is unavailable
 - WiFi is unavailable or disrupted
 - Assessment has to be discontinued

- General practice's workforce is unable or do not comply with the reasonable requests from the assessor during the assessment.
- Clearly articulate to the general practice, in writing, if necessary:
 - The contingency plan and process should the assessment not be able to proceed
 - The consequences of members of the general practice's workforce not following an assessor's reasonable direction, particularly in regard to the movement and placement of the camera, microphone volume and sharing of documents.

General practice

- Advise patients that the general practice is undergoing an assessment, and should an individual wish to participate, provide them with information about the assessment process and obtain their consent to participate
- Provide assessors with a security briefing or instructions, if required
- Ensure ICT devices are fully operational and charged
- Nominate an ICT support person to be responsible for the integrity of the practice's ICT systems during the assessment
- Ensure the nominated ICT support person is available to the assessors throughout the assessment
- Exchange contact details with assessors for all key contacts in the general practice and members of the assessment team
- Agree to a contingency plan with the accrediting agency in the event the assessment cannot be finalised as scheduled
- Ensure participants in the assessment are afforded privacy to speak with the assessors.

Information and communications technology systems

Accrediting agency

- If the ICT equipment is specified by the practice, The assessor must test the functionality and capacity of the ICT programs and equipment to be used prior to the commencement of the assessment
- If the ICT equipment is not specified by the practice, agencies are to determine the platform to be used after considering:
 - Capacity of the program to share screens for the review of documents
 - Ability of the assessor to take control of the screen
 - Availability of breakout rooms for different assessors to undertake review independently
 - Capacity to view documents in real time, including clinical and personnel files
 - Mobility of ICT equipment, including stability of the network.

General practice

- Confirm with the accrediting agency the videoconferencing software and ICT platform to be used during the virtual assessment
- Ensure there is sufficient and appropriate ICT equipment available for the assessment to proceed. If the assessment includes multiple sites, ensure there are sufficient supports and equipment at each site for the assessment to proceed
- Ensure documents to be presented as evidence can be made available securely to assessors, using, for example, drop box or other secure sites
- Test the IT equipment with those to be involved in the assessment. Ensure all of the workforce involved in the assessment have the IT skills and/or support to operate the IT equipment, including camera focus, volume and screen sharing
- Check all locations where the assessment will be conducted to identify areas where the WiFi signal may be weak or not accessible. Address any issues identified with the WiFi coverage.

Documentation

Accrediting agency

- Develop a virtual assessment privacy policy for assessors to follow.

General practice

Nil

During a hybrid assessment

Administration

Accrediting agency

- Limit the length of each session to ensure the virtual assessments are manageable for assessors and mindful of the health, safety and wellbeing of all participants with opportunities to take a break
- At the commencement of each interview or assessment session, clarify for participants:
 - If the meeting is being recorded
 - How and what documents will be accessed for review during the session
 - How security of data will be maintained
 - That the assessor will be able to request a change of camera direction, placement and movement at all times.
- Assessors should:
 - Ensure their camera is positioned so the assessor's full head and shoulders are visible to those viewing from the practice
 - Be located in a private, quiet environment to avoid interference, background distractions and noise
 - Be mindful of the background view of their location, and ensure it is appropriate
 - Use headphones or other equipment to maximise the capacity to hear and focus their attention, for example, headsets with a microphone or noise-cancelling headphones
 - Remain in control of the camera viewing the general practice at all times
 - Issue clear and direct instructions to practice participants if they are responsible for moving and positioning the camera at their end
 - Use check-back techniques to ensure what has been said is clearly heard and understood, particularly where there are poor or unstable IT connections

- Terminate the interview, observation, or the assessment if there is continued poor connections or inability to retain a connection, or where the general practice fails to comply with reasonable directions from the assessor
- Implement the contingency plan if the assessment is terminated.
- Where virtual breakout rooms are used, ensure privacy is maintained by inviting participants, nominating rooms and if required, virtually locking the room once a meeting has commenced
- Where meetings are recorded, assessors are to seek agreement from all participants before the meeting commences and provide a clear statement on how the recording will be used and if/when it will be deleted
- Ensure that communication between assessors who are onsite and assessors who virtual can easily occur
- Direct onsite assessors to follow up issues that have been identified by assessors using virtual access digital technology.

General practice

- Obtain permission from any patients involved in the assessment and provide them with information on the virtual assessment process
- Recognise that a general wide sweep of the camera does not need permission and is similar to an assessor being onsite.

Information technology systems

Accrediting agency

Nil

General practice

- Ensure the ICT equipment being used during the assessments:
 - Can be moved to all locations where the assessment is to occur
 - When being moved through a facility, the camera is facing forward
 - Is fully charged and includes backup power supply, if required
- Do not use virtual backgrounds during assessments. These reduce the likelihood of opportunistic observation of practice and environment.

Documentation

Accrediting agency

- Document in the final assessment report to the organisation:
 - Actions that could not be evidenced or not fully evidenced by virtual assessment
 - Barriers, technical difficulties or enablers during the assessment.
- Where an assessment is prematurely terminated and does not recommence, document:
 - The actions still to be assessed
 - The plan and timelines for the assessment to be finalised
 - Reasons for changes to assessment schedule
 - Areas not yet reviewed or not fully reviewed
 - Other options, including ICT systems considered or used to complete the assessment
 - The proposed action for the completion of the assessment, including:
 - Date for the completion of the assessment
 - Format for the completion of the assessment
 - Additional costs, if any
 - Implication and/or consequences of the delay.

General practice

At assessment:

- Ensure all relevant documents are readily available or easily accessible so meetings are not delayed waiting for documents to display
- Ensure ICT system has the functionality to enlarge documents if necessary so they can be easily read by assessors.

After a hybrid assessment

Administration

Accrediting agency

- Remove and delete any documents, images, or recordings accessed through the ICT system at the conclusion of the assessment
- Use the agency's monitoring systems to evaluate the effectiveness of the sessions of the assessment conducted using virtual access digital technology and ways to improve its effectiveness, including but not limited to:
 - Understanding and use of technology
 - Training of assessors
 - Information and instructions provided to participants
 - Design of the assessment schedule
 - Mix of onsite assessors and those present via virtual access digital technology
 - Role of assessors working virtually compared with role of assessors onsite, in relation to:
 - planning processes
 - contingency planning.

General practice

- Revoke assessors' ICT and security access, if relevant
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the virtual assessment and provide feedback to the accrediting agency and the Commission.

Documentation

Accrediting agency

- Assessment reports and testimonials are to state the assessment was a virtual assessment.

General practice

Nil