# Guidance on conducting hybrid assessments

**KEY ACTIONS** for accrediting agencies and health service organisations

## Assessment to the NSQHS Standards

**Hybrid assessment**

A hybrid assessment is a model of assessment where part of an accreditation assessment team is on-site of a health service organisation (HSO), and part of an assessment team is present using virtual access digital technology.

A range of information and communications technology (ICT) strategies can be used to facilitate assessments using virtual access digital technology, including but not limited to:

- Video conferencing and screen sharing and teleconferences, including programs such as Zoom, Webex, Blue Jeans
- Documents and records review by virtual access, either synchronously in real time or asynchronously using platforms such as Sharepoint and Dropbox.

Under the requirements of the Australian Health Service Safety and Quality Accreditation (AHSSQA) Scheme, health service organisations (HSOs) are required to regularly participate in external accreditation assessments conducted by an approved accrediting agency. The purpose of the assessment is to verify that the requirements of the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards have been implemented and to validate that safety and quality systems are in place.

Assessments are routinely conducted with all assessors on-site. In limited circumstances, such as public health restrictions, or unacceptable risks associated with accommodating an entire assessment team on site, accreditation assessments may be conducted using a hybrid assessment.

## When can a hybrid assessment be conducted?

Regular on-site assessment visits of HSOs are a requirement for accreditation under the AHSSQA Scheme. Hybrid assessments may be conducted in exceptional circumstances where:

- There is restricted access to all or part of a HSO due to public health orders or similar restrictions
- The safety of patients and assessors is affected because the HSO is considered high risk
- There are public health or border restrictions limiting movement of assessors across state and territory borders
- An on-site assessment has commenced but cannot be completed due to changes in public health or border restrictions. Delay of an on-site assessment would not allow sufficient time for a HSO's accreditation assessment to be completed prior to the current accreditation expiry date.

Hybrid assessment may also be considered for a health service organisation providing services over wide ranging, geographically remote locations. In some situations hybrid assessments may assist to strengthen and make assessment processes more efficient. Accrediting agencies may apply to conduct hybrid assessments for these services where there is evidence of centralised, systematic clinical governance and management systems, policies and processes.

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# AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION
## ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

**Hybrid assessments cannot
be conducted where:**

- The HSO is undergoing an interim accreditation assessment
- There has been a report of significant risk **AS18/09: Notification of significant risk**
- The HSO is undergoing a mandatory repeat assessment Fact Sheet 3: **Repeat assessment of health service organisations**
- Privacy, security, due process or impartiality cannot be guaranteed
- It is not feasible due to the limited availability, connectivity or performance of technology.

For health service organisations being assessed to the NSQHS Standards, virtual assessments can only be conducted as part of a hybrid assessment. The use of hybrid assessment:

- Is not intended to replace on-site assessments
- Requires half of the assessor days to be conducted on-site
- Must comply with local, state and territory confidentiality and privacy laws
- Must take into consideration the guidance set out in **Attachment 1.**

**Requirements for hybrid assessments**

✓ Accrediting agencies must seek approval from the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) prior to conducting a hybrid assessment

✓ Accrediting agencies and assessors must comply with the requirements of the AHSSQA Scheme and ensure the assessment processes are rigorous

✓ At least half of the assessment days (calculated by multiplying the number of assessors by number of days in an assessment) should be on-site

✓ One member of the assessment team should be on-site throughout the assessment

✓ Assessors must take all necessary steps to ensure that the integrity of the assessment is not compromised and that the systems being examined and people being interviewed do not vary because part of the assessment is conducted using virtual access digital technology

✓ All relevant areas within the health service organisation must be **viewed** and **assessed**

✓ The length of an accreditation assessment may need to be extended where limited numbers of assessors are on-site

✓ Assessors must clearly document in the HSO assessment report the reason that a virtual 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, actions or Standards that were assessed using virtual assessment.

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

## Questions?

For more information, please visit: **https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/safety-and-quality-advice-centre**

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

# Attachment 1:
# Guidance on conducting virtual assessments

## Approval to conduct a hybrid assessment

### Administration

**Accrediting agency**

- Conduct a risk assessment and feasibility review to ensure a robust hybrid assessment can be conducted, including consideration of
  - information communication technology (ICT) availability, capacity, security and reliability
  - size and complexity of the organisation
  - maturity of the organisations safety and quality systems
  - information on the organisation's layout
  - the extent and location(s) where virtual assessment will be used
- If a virtual assessment is feasible and meets the criteria, seek approval to conduct a hybrid assessment from the Commission.

**Health service organisation**

- Participate in or provide information for the risk assessment and feasibility review.

## Prior to a hybrid assessment

### Administration

**Accrediting agency**

- Agree the format of reviews to be conducted in operational areas, including
  - the involvement and capturing consumers in the camera view
  - complying with the requirement for 60% of the time to be spent in operational areas
  - the need for a virtual tour of the organisation at the commencement of the assessment
  - asking for a map of the organisation so assessors can orientate themselves during the assessment
  - considering time zones for assessors and health service organisation when agreeing the schedule of events

  - agreeing on mechanisms of communication with health service organisations during the assessment
  - agreeing on mechanisms for communication between assessment team members on–site and those present via virtual access digital technology
- Ensure all assessment team members
  - know and understand their role and responsibilities during the assessment, and ensure the tasks are well defined
  - have the skills and/or the support to use the ICT equipment
  - understand the risks and limitations of virtual assessments, particularly in relation to evidence gathering and the robustness of the assessment.
- 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 by which assessors will keep in contact during the assessment, individually and through group chat. Ensure this 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 the
  - video link is disconnected
  - voice link is unavailable
  - WiFi is unavailable
  - assessment has to be discontinued
  - organisation's workforce is unable or does not comply with the reasonable requests during the assessment
- Clearly articulate to the organisation, in writing if necessary
  - the contingency plan and process should the assessment not be able to proceed
  - the consequences of members of the organisation's workforce not following an assessor's reasonable direction, particularly in regard to the movement and placement of the camera, volume of the microphone, sharing of documents.

**Health service organisation**

- Provide assessors with a time limited clearance to the relevant programs and areas in the organisation's ICT systems
- 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 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 health service organisation 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.

## Information and communications technology systems

**Accrediting agency**

- If the ICT program is specified by the HSO, test the ICT programs and equipment to be used at assessment to ensure the IT equipment has the functionality and flexibility required for a robust assessment.
- If the ICT equipment is not specified by the organisation, determine which platform will be used by assessors 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, using high resolution camera/photography
  - mobility of ICT equipment, including stability of the network.

**Health service organisation**

- Confirm with the accrediting agency the videoconferencing software and ICT platform to be used during the virtual assessment
- Ensure there is sufficient appropriate ICT equipment available for the assessment to proceed. If the assessment includes multiple sites, ensure there is 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 policy for recording and photographing during the assessment sessions conducted using virtual access digital technology and provide a copy to the health service organisation.

**Health service organisation**

Nil.

# During a hybrid assessment

## Administration

### Accrediting agency

- Limit the length of each session to ensure the virtual assessments are manageable for assessors
  - 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 have control of the 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 in the organisation
  - be located in a private, quite 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, e.g. headsets with a microphone or noise cancelling headphones
  - remain in control of the camera viewing the health service organisation at all times
  - issue clear and direct instructions to members of the orgaisation's workforce if they are physically responsible for moving and positioning the camera
  - 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 health service organisations 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 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 that are on-site and assessors that are present using virtual access digital technology occurs regularly to share findings
- Direct assessors that are on-site to follow up issues that have been identified by assessors using virtual access digital technology.

### Health service organisation

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

## Information technology systems

### Accrediting agency

Nil.

### Health service organisation

- Ensure the ICT equipment being used during the assessments
  - can be moved on a stable surface, such as a trolley to all locations where the assessment is to occur
  - when being moved through a facility, the camera is facing forward
  - complies with infection prevention and control requirements for equipment being moved between clinical areas
  - 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
  - the reason a hybrid assessment was conducted
  - the sessions of the assessment conducted using virtual access digital technology
  - 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 by the assessment process
  - 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.

### Health service organisation

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 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 health service organisations
  - design of the assessment schedule
  - mix of on-site assessors and those present via virtual access digital technology
  - role of assessors present via virtual access digital technology compared with role of assessors on-site
  - planning processes
  - contingency planning.

### Health service organisation

- Revoke assessors ICT and security access
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the hybrid 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 hybrid assessment and include a virtual assessment component.

### Health service organisation

Nil.