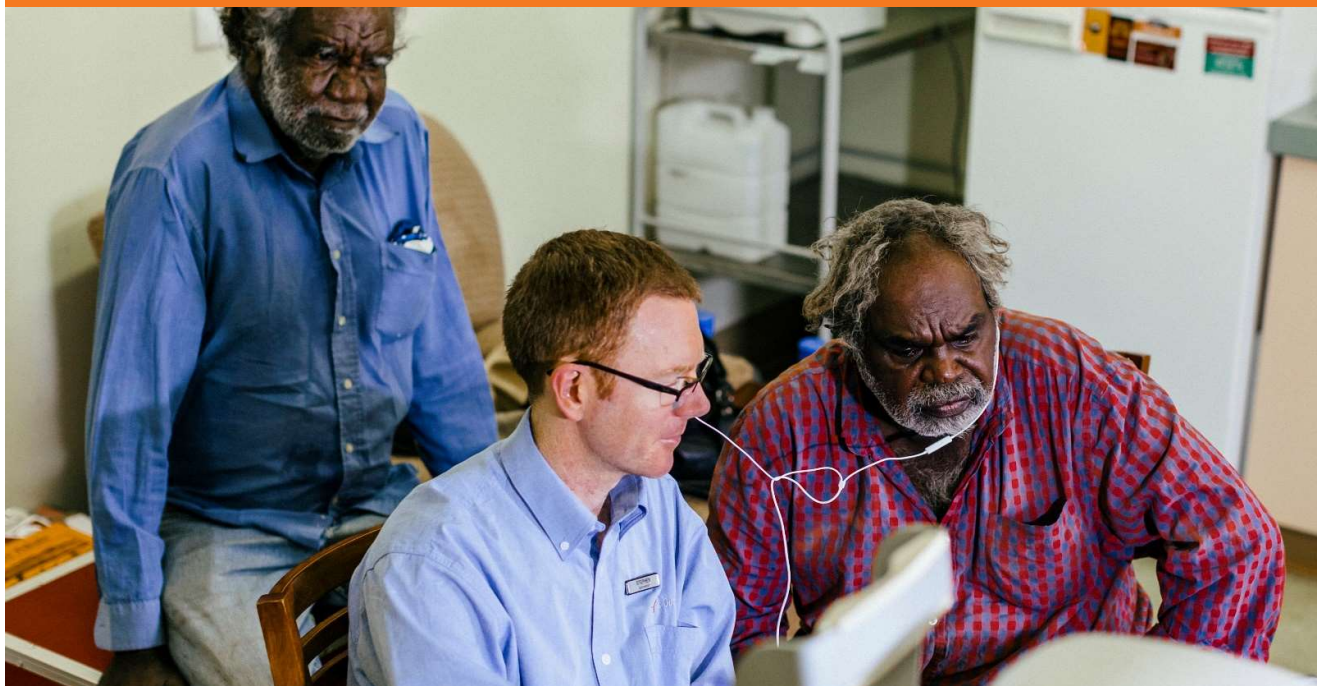


THE FRED HOLLOWES FOUNDATION INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA PROGRAM

Telehealth Information Sheet 2: Telehealth in Australia – more pilots than Qantas?

June 2018



MORE PILOTS THAN QANTAS?

The 'more pilots than Qantas' quip was first coined by telehealth expert Dr Victoria Wade, clinical director of Adelaide UniCare E-Health, and was considered so appropriate it has since reappeared in a variety of places – why? As Dr Ewen McPhee, a high-profile advocate of telehealth in rural Australia, puts it 'we know it works but the problem is there is low uptake, fragmented services, and a lack of sustainability'¹.

We are beginning to see the move from small pilot projects to embedding telehealth as business as usual in the provision of health care, particularly in regional and rural areas, with all jurisdictions now taking telehealth seriously. This is attributed to a mixture of political enthusiasm for 'sexy tech' and the 'hard yards' several clinical groups have put in over the years².

Challenges faced by sustainable implementation of telehealth services will be explored in future Telehealth Information Sheets, but for now – where and how is telehealth being used in Australia?



A proliferation of pilots

The literature refers to various pilots, trials, evaluations and systematic reviews of telehealth programmes³. In addition to funding for pilots provided by state and territories, the Australian Government Department of Health \$20.6m Telehealth Pilots Programme started in 2012 and funded 9 projects including aged and palliative care and cancer self-management. For more information on the Telehealth Pilots Programme:

<http://health.gov.au/ehealth-nbntelehealth>

Intended to show how important high-speed broadband is to the future of health care, proposals included CSIRO's tele-eye care services for 900 elderly and Indigenous Australians living in remote Western Australia and the Torres Strait Island.

<https://www.csiro.au/en/Research/BF/Areas/Digital-health/Improving-access/Eyecare>

In which regions/jurisdictions is Telehealth being used?

Telehealth is being used across Australia in a vast array of disciplines, including pharmacy, burns care, psychiatry, dermatology and diabetes management. NSW and Queensland appear to be most advanced jurisdictions in use of telehealth.

Two examples of the ways in which partners of the Indigenous Australia Program are using telehealth are:

Lions Outback Vision (WA) was established in 2010 with the support of the Lions Eye Institute and the University of Western Australia⁴. Lions Outback Vision aims to address the unique challenges of delivering quality specialist eye health care to regional, remote and Indigenous communities across Western Australia with the development and implementation of innovative and sustainable models of service delivery. They provide specialist eye health care services throughout the Pilbara, Kimberley, Goldfields, Midwest and Great Southern regions of Western Australia. More information about the ways in which Lions Outback Vision are using telehealth can be found here:

<https://www.outbackvision.com.au/telehealth/>

The **Institute for Urban Indigenous Health** (South East Queensland) undertook a process redesign of a surgical pathway to improve access to cataract surgery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people⁵. The mainstream cataract surgical pathway was mapped

and innovatively redesigned, including the use of telehealth for postoperative ophthalmologist consultations, to reduce the number of patients being lost to the system at key transition points. For more info: <http://www.publish.csiro.au/PY/PY17039>

Other telehealth programmes servicing remote Indigenous communities

Several telehealth programmes, projects and research are underway:

The **Laynhapuy Homelands Health** team provides health services in 20 very remote communities in East Arnhem Land. Last year AMSANT set up facilities for video conferencing in 3 of the larger Laynha homelands. Facilities can be operated by the community health workers, providing access to the office, the medical director in Sydney and specialist services outside North East Arnhem Land. The article describes an example of the value of the facilities in the case of a cancer patient, where genuine 2-way conversation occurred resulting in the patient and surgeon having a greater understanding and developing trust, to assist the patient and her family make decisions about treatment. Reported in NT Continuous Quality Improvement Strategy, Edition 1, 2018. For more info: <http://www.amsant.org.au/cqi/>; <http://www.laynhapuy.com.au/services/laynhapuy-health-community-services/>

Cherbourg ENT - Indigenous health workers from the Cherbourg community are trained and provided with a fully equipped vehicle. The health workers travel to forty schools in the South Burnett region providing routine ear health screening of Indigenous children. A Brisbane-based ear nose and throat surgeon performs a telehealth review of otoscopic images and hearing tests captured by the health workers. Appropriate referral to local GPs or specialist outreach services ensures treatment for kids when ear disease is identified.

This service evolved from a small-scale feasibility study in 2007 to a fully integrated community owned and run ear health screening service. The Darling Downs Hospital and Health Services provides a research grant to UQ's Centre for Online Health to evaluate the health outcomes and economics of the approach.

<https://chsr.centre.uq.edu.au/project/cherbourg-ent>

Indigenous **Telediabetes** PhD, to evaluate the effectiveness of telediabetes services for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in



the Queensland (Qld) communities of Cunnamulla and Charleville⁵

Indigenous **Hepatitis C** treatment, a study to examine the feasibility, efficacy, acceptability and practicalities of a new model of care in which primary care providers at the Yulu-Burri-Ba Aboriginal Corporation for Community Health clinics will be supported in the new treatment options of HCV patients by a specialist hepatology team at the Princess Alexandra Hospital – <https://chsr.centre.uq.edu.au/project/indigenous-hepatitis-c-treatment>

The DREAMT (Dementia, Regional and remote, Empowering, Aboriginal and Torres Strait, Medicine and Telemedicine and telehealth) project to implement and assess a telehealth service for **dementia care** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in rural and remote Queensland - <https://chsr.centre.uq.edu.au/project/dreamt>

Evaluation of implementation of *e-PIMH Telepsychiatry* will facilitate specialist services to rural and remote areas, to help parents and carers of infants/children aged 0-4 years living in regional, rural, and remote Queensland with their mental health needs. <https://chsr.centre.uq.edu.au/project/epimh-telepsychiatry>

Other examples of telehealth in Australia

- Women's and Children's Health Network <http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/services/az/other/telehealth/index.html>
- Integrated Cardiovascular Clinical Network (ICNet) <http://iccnetsa.org.au/>
- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine <http://www.acrrm.org.au/search/find-online-learning/details?id=1019>
<http://www.ehealth.acrrm.org.au/provider/tele-derm> (includes YouTube video of Dr Tim Muir providing tour of TeleDerm, a store-and-forward dermatology service)

Other applications of telehealth

The opportunities seem almost endless when considering possible applications for telehealth and some others are:

- Corrections, e.g. the remoteness of prisons in the NT leading to an increase in use of telehealth technology⁶
- Humanitarian and low resource settings – championed by MSF and its International President⁷

This information sheet has been prepared by an external consultant in collaboration with the Indigenous Australia Program.

This is a live document and any corrections, additions or other feedback is most appreciated.

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- ⁴ <https://www.lei.org.au/services/lions-outback-vision/>
- ⁵ Penrose, L, Roe, Y, Johnson NA, James EL (2018) Process redesign of a surgical pathway improves access to cataract surgery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in South East Queensland *Australian Journal of Primary Health* 24(2): 135-140 CSRIO Publishing.
- ⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014 Bulletin 123 Prisoner health services in Australia August 2014. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b80b7d02-7238-4fc1-96ed-742f38bb9844/17454.pdf.aspx?inline=true>
- ⁷ <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/article/telemedicine-front-lines;>
[https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/article/msf-telemedicine-brings-care-patients-remote-areas ;](https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/article/msf-telemedicine-brings-care-patients-remote-areas;)
<https://rctom.hbs.org/submission/telemedicine-removing-the-borders-in-doctors-without-borders/>

