

CFAHR Evidence Brief

Embedding high-quality, sustainable, patient-centric telehealth services within Allied Health: A guide for optimised practice beyond COVID-19

Authors and Affiliations

Renee Cook^{1,2,3,4}, Dr Emma E Thomas^{1,2}, **Prof Elizabeth C Ward**³, A/Prof Liam J Caffery^{1,2}, Julie-Anne Ross⁵, Clare Webb⁶, Michael Harris⁷, Carina Hartley⁸, Phil Carswell¹⁰, Dr Angela Vivanti^{5,9}, Clare Burns¹¹, Dr Helen M Haydon^{1,2}, Monica L Taylor^{1,2}, Rita Hwang^{1,5}

¹ Centre for Online Health, The University of Queensland, Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

² Centre for Health Services Research, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

³ Centre for Functioning and Health Research (CFAHR), Metro South Health, and, School of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences, The University of Queensland, Brisbane Australia

⁴ Speech Pathology Department, Princess Alexandra Hospital, Metro South Health, Queensland, Australia

⁵ Allied Health, Princess Alexandra Hospital, Metro South Health, Brisbane, Australia

⁶ Allied Health, Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Hospital, Metro South Health, Brisbane, Australia

⁷ Allied Health, Bayside Health Service, Metro South Health, Brisbane, Australia

⁸ Allied Health, Logan Hospital, Metro South Health, Brisbane, Australia

⁹ School of Human Movement and Nutrition Studies, University of Queensland, Brisbane Australia

¹⁰ Consumer Advisor, Princess Alexandra Hospital, Metro South Health, Brisbane, Australia

¹¹ Speech Pathology Department, Royal Brisbane & Women's Hospital, Metro North Health, Brisbane, Australia

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Alignment with [Metro South Health Research Strategy 2019 - 2024](#)

- Build research capability
- Increase research capacity
- Embed research in clinical services
- Translate research to better health
- Research excellence

Alignment with [Allied Health Research Capability & Development Strategy 2021 - 2025](#)

- Engage staff as research consumers
- Enable staff as research generators
- Build research-enabling infrastructure and strategic processes
- Strengthen leadership in research and innovation
- Enhance internal research collaboration and synergy
- Strengthen partnerships with consumers and external stakeholders

ICARE² values



Alignment with [Allied Health Research Capability & Development Strategy 2021 - 2025](#)

- Standard 1 – Clinical Governance
- Standard 2 – Partnering with consumers
- Standard 3 – Preventing and controlling healthcare-associated infection
- Standard 4 – Medication safety
- Standard 5 – Comprehensive care
- Standard 6 – Communicating for safety
- Standard 7 – Blood management
- Standard 8 – Recognising and responding to acute deterioration

Practice Issues

The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it an urgent need to deliver high quality health care at a distance prompting a dramatic increase in telehealth. As COVID-19 restrictions reduce globally, services will determine what components of care will continue via telehealth. An opportunity now exists to understand how telehealth has been used to date within MSH Allied Health (AH) services and to develop a framework to support sustained use. Whilst other implementation and explanatory frameworks exist to evaluate and offer strategies for sustainability, they are not always applicable to telehealth use in allied health; have been developed without consumer input; and have been developed outside of the Australian healthcare context. We aimed to determine the consumer, clinician, service, and system level factors that influence sustained use of telehealth within MSH AH services and develop a framework to enhance sustained use of telehealth. These research findings will then be used to guide redesign of select AH telehealth services with MSH.

Evidence

Eighty allied health staff (14 managers, 58 clinicians, 7 administration officers) from 16 allied health departments across four hospitals within MSH participated in a semi-structured interview or focus group (clinicians). Framework analysis was used to analyse the transcript data deductively against Grenhalgh's Non-adoption, Abandonment, Sale-up, Spread, and Sustainability (NASSS) framework. The NASSS framework aims to facilitate the evaluation of implementation processes and factors related to technology innovations. Service activity data from June 2019-August 2021 was also reviewed, comparing 3 time-points: pre-COVID, peak COVID and post peak COVID restrictions.

Service activity data revealed the increased telehealth use noted during the peak COVID period reverted to in-person activity as restrictions eased. Key themes from the interviews and focus groups included: (1) telehealth is unlikely to be sustained without a clear strategy including determination of roles and responsibilities across the organisation, (2) clinician resistance due to forced adoption remains a key issue, (3) the main motivator for clinicians to use telehealth was improved consumer-centred care. Data also revealed a greater value proposition for clinicians is needed to sustain telehealth, and improvements are required to make the telehealth experience seamless for providers and recipients.

These findings were integrated and synthesised into a comprehensive framework that can be used as a blueprint for system-wide improvements and service enhancement or redesign.

In the next stage of this project, focus group data is being further analysed to explore the factors that influence how allied health practitioners select patients for telehealth. The aim is detail and explore these factors to ensure equitable and evidenced based criteria are adopted when offering telehealth services to patients. Additionally, to capture the consumer voice, 17 consumer interviews and 42 on-line surveys exploring consumers' perceptions of recent allied health telehealth experiences have been completed. Interviews and surveys were guided by the Institute of Medicines' Six Domains of Healthcare Quality framework. The data will be analysed using qualitative description to determine whether the use of telehealth is meeting consumer perceptions of quality healthcare.

Practice Change

The devised framework outlines the changes required across every level of the health system, including clinical department level, health service level and broader state government level, to enable high-value telehealth delivery that is integrated and sustained. The framework also informs how these strategies can be acted. Whilst developed for allied health disciplines, it is likely applicable to other disciplines. The framework along with the two additional bodies of work currently underway (consumer voice and factors influencing patient selection for telehealth) will inform phase two of the project, commencing in 2023, which will involve the redesign of selected allied health telehealth services within MSH.

Publication/s

Thomas, E. E., Taylor, M. L., Ward, E. C., Hwang, R., Cook, R., Ross, J.-A., Webb, C., Harris, M., Hartley, C., Carswell, P., Burns, C. L., & Caffery, L. J. (2022). Beyond forced telehealth adoption: A framework to sustain telehealth among allied health services. *Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare*, 1357633X221074499–1357633X221074499. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357633X221074499>

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Metro South Health Research Strategy 2019 – 2024 https://qheps.health.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0012/2325000/research-strategy.pdf

Allied Health Research Capability & Development Strategy 2021 – 2025 <https://metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/allied-health-research-strategy.pdf>

National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards <https://www.safetvandquality.gov.au/sites/default/files/migrated/Overview-of-the-NSQHS-Standards-second-edition.pdf>