

MEDIA RELEASE

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MORE THAN 10,000 WESTERN QUEENSLANDERS NOW USING TELEHEALTH-CARE THROUGH THEIR GP

LATEST DATA: Almost 90% of surveyed health providers willing to embrace telehealth as “routine care” post COVID-19.

Western Queensland is experiencing a boom in Telehealth-Care with soaring numbers of patients now accessing medical support via telephone and video.

Latest data from General Practices in the region show that in the past 7 weeks alone, more than 9000 patients have had at least one Telehealth phone call with their GP, almost 500 have undertaken a video call with their doctor and almost 800 have consulted a Nurse Practitioner via telephone.

Compiled by the Western Queensland Primary Health Network’s (WQPHN) Health Intelligence Unit, the figures show that more than 16% of the region’s entire population (62,038) have accessed Telehealth since the start of April 2020.

“Clearly we are observing a trend sparked by coronavirus, but we’ve also considered what the future looks like beyond COVID-19, and what we’re seeing is a widespread desire for Telehealth to become a bigger part of primary care in the bush,” explains WQPHN CEO Stuart Gordon.

“The feedback we’re getting is that while issues like connectivity and technical capability need to be addressed, there is strong support across our region for better utilisation of Telehealth in the post-pandemic world.”

“It’s pleasing to see the Commonwealth now indicating rebates for rural and remote Telehealth services may continue beyond September in response to what we’re seeing in the West,” Mr Gordon said.

In a separate [WQPHN survey of 59 commissioned health providers](#) (non-GPs), 48% said they’d experienced a “satisfactory or advanced” uptake of Telehealth since the pandemic struck, with 88% “willing to change” by incorporating Telehealth as part of their routine service offering post-COVID.

Also reported in the survey conducted in the last week of April, 55% of providers said telephone was the most popular Telehealth platform, with video at 36% and email at 9%.

“Telehealth-Care makes absolute sense for rural and remote Queenslanders in our patch because often a face-to-face consult with the nearest GP, specialist or allied health practitioner can require a full day or more of travel, which can impact a patient’s recovery,” WQPHN Executive Manager Sandy Gillies said.

“Face-to-face consults will always be the gold-standard when it comes to primary care, but we see Telehealth as a vital adjunct that can improve access to care for remote patients, or those with mobility issues, the elderly, or where cultural barriers exist,” she said.

Southwest Queenslander Maggie Wade, who lives on a cattle property outside Charleville, said she’s been using Telehealth for decades.

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"I think it's really good because you can get immediate information from your doctor and it's been very reassuring when you live a fair distance from town," Maggies explains.

"I think it's a great initiative and I'm sad something like coronavirus has had to bring it to the fore, but I'm sure there'll be some good come out of this thing, if they continue with Telehealth."

The WQPHN has recently launched a "[Telehealth-Care Guide](#)" to help support rural and remote health practitioners build on their knowledge and improve their capacity to deliver Telehealth in the region.

WESTERN QUEENSLAND CLINICIANS HAVE THEIR SAY ON TELEHEALTH-CARE

"Patients are already considering their options when they call our receptionist to book an appointment, they've already thought about *'do I actually need to see the doctor, do I need an examination, or is this something that can be done over the phone'*."

Dr Zowie Bailey - Charleville GP

"Being able to do chronic disease management over Telehealth has also afforded a really good opportunity for our country patients who sometimes don't see the benefit of coming in for their care plan, yet they'd be more than happy to do it over Telehealth."

Dr Rosie Geraghty – Roma GP

"That follow-up appointment does not necessarily have to be a face-to-face, it can save patients a lot of time and money and stress if those follow-ups can happen via Telehealth. The tyranny of distance has to be accounted for; we have to implement something else in healthcare out here to help communities."

Dr Leonie Fromberg – Cloncurry GP

"Telephones always work so if people can't do video, we're doing a lot of things over the phone as well which is actually suiting people, but it's been a bit of a change."

Renee Blackman – Gidgee Healing CEO – Mount Isa

Western Qld Primary Health Network (WQPHN) quick facts:

- commissions health services in Western Queensland
- covers almost one million square kilometres of Queensland, 55% of the state's total land area
- aligns health investment with demonstrated population health needs
- uses health intelligence data to orientate health services efficiently and effectively
- ensures the right primary health care is delivered, at the right time by the right provider
- advised by GPs and other health professionals and consumers
- one of 31 PHNs across Australia established and funded by the Commonwealth Government

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