

Risks and Opportunities of Transitioning to Telehealth: *Is it as easy as picking up the phone?*

When transitioning to telehealth, here are a few reasons why training your staff makes sense as a priority. **Avoid the common mistakes** that experienced providers grappled with in the early days. HealthChange Associates has been a leader in the provision of staff training and service re-design for both public and Not for Profit organisations delivering telehealth services in Australia and Canada over the last 15 years. Here are some of the things that we have learned.

What's the risk?

A major assumption that will put the quality and the outcomes of your service at risk is that clinicians will be able to easily adapt to telehealth consultations and achieve the same results as face to face.

Changing to a telehealth delivery mode requires clinicians to navigate a different environment which **demands they alter the order and nature of their clinical tasks in tele-consultations**. Telehealth consults necessitate a greater emphasis on communication and skilled information exchange to engage, activate and facilitate patient self-management effectively. Clinicians are often apprehensive and low in confidence and skills to do this.¹ The average face to face consult adherence is around 50%² and without telehealth delivery training, the patient outcomes are likely to be poorer.

Where is the opportunity?

HealthChange® Methodology training helps clinicians with what to say, how to say it and when to say it in their telehealth consultations to get the best results with patients. Training increases clinician confidence and skills^{1,3} while maintaining or improving patient engagement and outcomes.^{4,5,6} The added benefit is that these skills can then be transferred back into face to face clinical practice for additional improved outcomes when telehealth is not required.

HealthChange® Methodology (HCM) provides organisations with a systematic way to measure, improve and report on service quality and clinical outcomes. Major Australian government-funded and NFP program providers such as Medibank Health Solutions Telehealth, Remedy Healthcare, Bupa, Healthways and NSW and QLD State Governments have invested heavily in HCM staff training and system design over the last 15 years to achieve a high standard of care delivery in the areas of chronic condition prevention, management and rehabilitation. The methodology assists implementation of person-centred services that deliver consistent health care across teams and various delivery modalities.

So if you are investing in telehealth services and technology, **don't reinvent the wheel**. Capitalise on this opportunity to take a different, more efficient path to embed new systems and upskill your workforce at the same time.

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1 Lawford, B.J. et al (2018), Training Physical Therapists in Person-Centered Practice for People With Osteoarthritis: A Qualitative Case Study. Arthritis Care Res, 70: 558-570. doi:[10.1002/acr.23314](https://doi.org/10.1002/acr.23314)

2 WHO 2003

3 Lawford, B.J., et al (2019), Implementation of person-centred practice principles and behaviour change techniques after a 2-day training workshop: A nested case study involving physiotherapists. Musculoskeletal Care, 17:221-233. doi:10.1002/msc.1395

4 O'Hara, B.J. et al (2012), Effectiveness of Australia's Get Healthy Information and Coaching Service®:

Translational research with population wide impact. Preventive Medicine 55:292-298

5 Hamar, B.G et al (2018), Effect of post-hospital discharge telephonic intervention on hospital readmissions in a privately insured population in Australia. Australian Health Review, 42, 241-247 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1071/AH16059>

6 Joss, N et al (2013) Evaluation of the WorkHealth Coach Program http://research.iscr.com.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/335878/evaluation-of-the-workhealth-coach-program.pdf