# Positive Staying Strong project results sees telehealth program expansion

**Tunstall**

Community care provider integratedliving has begun a roll out of telehealth services to 13 different regions in four states following the success of its Staying Strong telehealth pilot project, which trialled in-home and hub-based monitoring of vital signs for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The $2.1 million Staying Strong trial project, originally funded under the NBN Enabled Telehealth Pilots Program, addressed chronic disease management in rural and remote communities.

The pilot project helped to deliver a new model of care through telehealth monitoring of vital health signs for 136 older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders across New South Wales and Queensland.

The Staying Strong pilot project involved four NBN-enabled sites - Armidale, Coffs Harbour, Toowoomba and Goodna.

The service was delivered both in-home and through telehealth hubs at local Aboriginal medical centres which provide a safe and welcoming environment for older Indigenous community members to learn about and use the telehealth service.

The project monitored participants with varying conditions, including high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and high blood cholesterol, with integratedliving registered nurses working with participants and their GP to develop individual health and monitoring plans based on these health needs.

Using the Tunstall myclinic telehealth solution, including a touchscreen tablet, Integrated Care Platform (ICP) monitoring software, and vital sign peripherals, participants self monitored their vital signs.

Health data was transmitted to the ICP triage manager patient management system which prioritised readings for clinical triage. If a reading was outside of the monitoring plan range, ICP triage manager raised an alert, allowing a nurse to coordinate the appropriate response, in consultation with the participant and their GP or Health Service.

> " Throughout the course of the project, it was found that even participants with chronic, fairly complex health conditions were both willing and able to manage the simultaneous monitoring of their multiple conditions through the use of telehealth.

## Key findings

· Remote telehealth monitoring represented less than half the costs associated with former model

· Increase in timely and accurate diagnosis

· Increase in patient awareness and self-management

· Project identified older Indigenous Australians are quite confident using technology

· Participants found the technology clear and understandable as well as easy to learn and use

· Telehealth nursing services cover 13 regions across New South Wales, Queensland, the ACT and Tasmania

## Trusting in telehealth

integratedliving Project Manager, Indra Arunachalam said the project reported an increase in timely and accurate diagnosis, as well as a notable increase in patient awareness and self-management.

"The project identified that older Indigenous Australians are quite confident using technology. With good internet connection, telehealth monitoring can deliver successful health outcomes for people living in rural and regional Australia," said Ms Arunachalam.

**integratedliving**
*enriching communities*
*supporting individuals*

The final report on the project concluded an overwhelmingly positive response with 98 per cent of participants reporting they had enjoyed being part of the project.

Acceptance of the telehealth system was bolstered by the independent evaluation in the study's follow-up questionnaire, which discovered that participants found the technology clear and understandable, as well as easy to learn and use.

The project also identified a trend of participants feeling more safe and secure with a telehealth system in place. Not only could they see their monitoring results for themselves, they also had the peace of mind that someone else was keeping an eye on them, such as a registered nurse (RN), who would address the situation should the need arise.

# Connected health into the future-savings

When compared to traditional, face-to-face delivery of clinical management, the remote telehealth monitoring model represented less than half of the costs associated from the former model.

**Throughout the Staying Strong project, the cost for remote telehealth monitoring for five days a week was £70 per participant. This is a significantly more affordable option compared to the estimated £178 it would usually cost for a RN to travel to a participant's home for face-to-face vital health sign monitoring.**

The pilot has shown telehealth can be useful in reducing the cost burden of healthcare.

More importantly, Staying Strong facilitated the development of strong and effective partnerships with Aboriginal organisations and communities, which was vital not only to the successful attainment of the project objectives, but also for enhancing opportunities to continue to support older Aboriginal people.

The success of the trial provides evidence that telehealth should be considered in new models of care that will lead to the mainstreaming of telehealth for aged, community and social care.

integratedliving has now been able to roll out mainstream telehealth nursing services on a bigger scale, covering 13 regions across New South Wales, Queensland, the ACT and Tasmania.

The expansion of the telehealth service was part of the company's commitment to eHealth and to facilitating health and well-being in the community as part of its service model, which it has dubbed "Embracing Life".

> *It's nice when the nurse rings me and says 'I think you'd better get to the doctors'. Just having someone to talk to helps a lot and knowing that they are there and they will ring you if they think you should go*
>
> **Yarning Circle resident participant.**

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