

18th December 2023

Hon. Dr Shane Reti  
Minister of Health  
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Wellington 6160

E te Minita, tēnā koe

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Health. On behalf of the New Zealand Telehealth Forum, we welcome you to your new role.

In partnership with Te Whatu Ora, The New Zealand Telehealth forum has been instrumental in guiding the development of telehealth in Aotearoa New Zealand – There is no doubt that the health sector is under great strain, but COVID has given us important insights as to the potential role that telehealth can play to support healthcare delivery – let's grasp this opportunity.

This briefing will:

- introduce you to the NZ Telehealth Forum
- outline the work that the Forum is undertaking
- highlight some of the challenges we need to address
- propose some opportunities and key focus areas.

## About the Telehealth Forum

The forum is made up of a broad cross-section of health sector leaders and includes clinicians, professional colleges, health administrators, Information Communication Technology (ICT) experts and health equity advocates.

We champion telehealth as an enabler of improved and equitable access to health care. Our vision is that

*'Telehealth will be embedded across the health sector as an equitable and sustainable way to deliver healthcare in New Zealand.'*

The Forum is an expert advisory group to Te Whatu Ora and to the wider sector. We take a partnership approach with the sector and have built strong relationships with organisations such as the NZMC, NZNC and HQSC alongside the special relationship we have with the Te Whatu Ora Data and Digital team, from whom we receive some operational funding.

The Forum has been a valued advisor to the health sector for over a decade. We coordinate thought leadership and advise on matters related to telehealth and its implementation, supporting, advising, and providing insights and resources to support developments. [Read more about the Forum](#)

## Current State of Telehealth in New Zealand

**Primary care:** Telehealth in primary care started using software-based video platforms and broadband internet around five years ago. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption and usage of telehealth services in primary care, however, the type and range of telehealth services available in many areas still remain limited and patchy.

**Secondary care:** This year, the NZ Telehealth Forum undertook a stocktake of public hospital telehealth delivery, which indicates that the gains in telehealth made over the COVID period are reversing and that there is an uneven playing field in telehealth delivery across the motu a postcode lottery of telehealth service delivery is evident.

Over the last three years, the use of technology to deliver healthcare has expanded markedly. During 2022-2023, the New Zealand Telehealth Forum, in collaboration with Massey University, has conducted its third major **Stocktake** of public hospital use of telehealth. The stocktake demonstrates that COVID-19 pandemic-related investment has largely driven the increased use of telehealth. Districts have varying degrees of telehealth capability (technical, training, and system integration) and have had mixed experiences in deploying telehealth during the pandemic. Our findings suggest that to drive high-quality telehealth as a constituent part of healthcare, now is the time to invest in stable infrastructure and clinical team support.

[View Stocktake Document](#)

In 2022, the New Zealand Telehealth Forum's Leadership Group worked with the sector to develop a concept paper on a "**Patient Anywhere, Clinician Elsewhere**" (PACE) model of care. This paper outlines the sectors' views on the benefits and barriers to support the development of "virtual hospital" models and makes several recommendations. We are currently developing a high-level business case model that could be applied to a wide range of specialities and delivery settings with goals:

- to deliver standardised equitable healthcare no matter where you are;
- to improve access to healthcare for underserved/priority populations;
- to avoid delays in diagnosis and treatment and to meet healthcare delivery targets;
- to provide choice as to where, when and how tangata whai ora receive health care;
- to assist services to embed telehealth as a means to support Pae Ora;
- to enable all healthcare workers to work to the top of scope and to access expert opinions.

PACE provides a feasible work model, an opportunity to reduce pressure on the acute care system and to support rural communities and others who have difficulty accessing traditional health care.

[View PACE Document](#)

## Future Opportunities

The New Zealand Telehealth Forum is the "glue" that supports telehealth in New Zealand as it increasingly becomes an integrated and important part of healthcare provision. As an advisory group rather than a provider of health care, we are well placed to support telehealth innovations at the national, regional, and local levels to address New Zealand's postcode lottery and support our health workforce.

We welcome an opportunity to work with you in these joint endeavours.

Nāku, nā

**Dr Ruth Large**, on behalf of the NZ Telehealth Forum  
(*New Zealand Telehealth Forum Chair*)

