



Using telehealth with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in rural communities

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Aim: This project reports on the evaluation of the *Staying Strong* project, which aimed to enable older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to better manage chronic health conditions by using telehealth self-monitoring equipment, primarily in their own homes. The project was located in two sites in NSW and two in Qld.

Methods: Base-line and end-of-evaluation surveys were conducted, along with a series of Yarning Circles and one-on-one interviews with participants, staff and other stakeholders. Readings from the telehealth equipment were recorded in a Central Data Monitoring Centre. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS 20; qualitative data were transcribed and read by two of the research team to identify recurring themes.

Results: There were 70 'valid' Baseline surveys and 54 follow-up surveys completed by participants. Demographic characteristics included mean age (62), gender (52 females, 18 males), and marital status (22 married; 17 widowed or divorced, 19 single). The majority of participants had five or more chronic health conditions; the most common were diabetes and high or low blood pressure. Attitude to Technology was positive at both survey times and Social Connectedness scores were high. Compliance was generally good. There were 570/27,752 "outside of set parameters" readings, of which 330 were 'high' (red) alerts. Participants demonstrated increased awareness and improved understanding of their health conditions and what impacts those. Project barriers and enablers were identified.

Conclusions: Participants demonstrated a high level of engagement with the technology but some equipment needs to be more user-friendly. Reliable and fast Internet connection is critical for telehealth monitoring. Systematic review of monitoring plans could reduce the number of missed readings. Better outcomes result when GPs and RNs work together.