

Rural connections, possibilities through telepractice

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Telepractice is fast emerging as a relevant response to meeting the early intervention needs of families in rural and regional areas. A number of factors, including wider availability of technology, more affordable equipment costs, and the ongoing need for access to appropriate services, have led to an increasing use of telepractice to meet the diverse needs of families in rural and regional communities. Technology allows practitioners to overcome the challenges associated with distance, isolation and lack of services by providing families with early intervention on-demand, whenever and wherever services are needed.

Our organisation provides educational services, audiological management, assessment and therapy supports to children with hearing and/or vision loss and their families throughout Australia. In metropolitan areas, individual and group early intervention services are delivered 'in-person' through home-based or centre-based sessions. Families in regional and remote areas are able to access similar early intervention services through home-based or centre-based 'telepractice' sessions using videoconferencing technology. Our organisation continually explores ways to improve services to families in regional and remote Australia, including developing models of 'blended service' which combine both in-person sessions and videoconference sessions in order to meet the individual needs of families. Our service allows clients to regularly access a highly qualified multidisciplinary team that includes audiologists, psychologists, occupational therapists, teachers and speech and language therapists, without geography being a barrier.

This presentation will outline how, with the effective use of telepractice, it has been possible to overcome geographical barriers in order to provide a client-centred high quality service model that enables consistency and continuity of access to specialist services throughout Australia and is tailored to meet the needs of individual families.

Through the presentation of a case study, we will demonstrate how the service delivery model of telepractice has been used to successfully support the individual needs of a family in regional Australia, from diagnosis of hearing loss to cochlear implantation and ongoing rehabilitation and support from a multidisciplinary team of specialists.