

Rural telehomecare helping chronic disease and an ageing population

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Background: Chronic diseases in Australia form a large part of repeat hospitalisations every year. Patients with chronic disease are at high risk of multiple hospital admissions, poorer quality of life and as a result place greater burdens on overstretched health systems. Avoidable hospitalisations increase with remoteness in Australia, which in part is related to patients in such settings having less access to support when leaving hospital. Home monitoring through telehomecare has been developed to help support patients as they transition from acute services to the home. These services have also been developed to help monitor geriatric populations at higher risk of re-hospitalisation following admission.

Objectives: This report will review current telehomecare programs run throughout Canada, the United States of America and Brazil. It will draw on lessons learnt and experiences from observing and participating in telehomecare programs as a part of a Churchill Fellowship focusing on telehealth in rural and remote communities. The report will provide first hand knowledge of successes and challenges associated with telehomecare and will form advice on best practice principles for developing telehomecare programs in rural communities. This report will also look at the results from international models, which have described decreased hospitalisation, GP visit, and walk-in clinic rates.

Key points

- Describe what telehomecare is, how it is run and patient outcomes achievable
- Describe telehomecare programs across Nunavut and Ontario in Canada, and Alaska in the United States of America
- Discuss key factors why telehomecare needs to be implemented
- Highlight challenges associated with the application of telehomecare
- Highlight common success factors for telehomecare

Conclusion: With an ageing population and a growing burden of chronic disease in Australia, health care systems need to be innovative to help support patients at home. This involves helping empower individuals to self-care through supported telehomecare models. These models have shown to decrease hospitalisation of these at-risk groups and have positive patient outcomes. Such models are more pertinent in rural and remote communities whereby access to support staff in communities are decreased comparatively to urban centres.