



Submission to the Queensland Health & Community Services Committee

Inquiry into Telehealth Services in Queensland

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Introduction

National Disability Services (NDS) is the peak industry body for non-government disability services. Its purpose is to promote and advance services for people with disability. Its Australia-wide membership includes over 900 non-for-profit organisations, which support people with all forms of disability. Its members collectively provide the full range of disability services, from accommodation support, respite and therapy to community access and employment. NDS provides information and networking opportunities to its members and policy advice to State, Territory and Federal governments.

NDS welcomes the opportunity to lodge a submission to the Inquiry into telehealth services in Queensland. While NDS members primarily deliver disability support to facilitate the participation of people with a disability in the community, many NDS members also deliver a range of allied health and health related services to their clients. Member organisations are located across all parts of Queensland and support people in regional and remote communities, including indigenous communities.

We know that people with a disability comprise a significant proportion of the users of health services in Queensland. Historically many families of people with a disability have had to relocate their families to south east Queensland so that they could access appropriate health and disability services for their sons and daughters.

With improved medical intervention, we are now seeing people with a disability living longer and experiencing age related health issues in addition to those of their disability. At the other end of the age continuum, members advise that they are now supporting children and young people with higher and more complex medical support and health needs than ever before.

With the movement from institutional care, changing community attitudes and expectations there is increasing pressure from people with a disability and their families to be able to access quality and informed healthcare within their local community. Telehealth services have a vital role to play in responding to this expectation.

Matters for consideration

NDS *supports the definition of telehealth* adopted for the Inquiry, noting that telehealth includes a range of health strategies and interventions that are not limited to the domain of Queensland Health.

Queensland non government disability organisations have been using telehealth strategies to deliver allied health, nursing and other health and disability related services for more than a decade. Service providers use existing infrastructure (software/hardware) as well as support the development of new technology in partnership with Queensland Universities and business.

NDS members receive financial support from a range of sources (including the Commonwealth, Home & Community Care Program, Department of Communities, Child Safety & Disability Services, and Trusts and Foundations) to deliver telehealth related services.

In considering the future of telehealth services in Queensland, the committee should be mindful that **Queensland Health does not have a monopoly on telehealth services and should be encouraged to work closely with the many stakeholders involved in the delivery of telehealth services across Queensland**. Collaboration should lead to a reduction in duplication of effort, and ensure that funds invested at all levels are more cost-effectively targeted.

The use of telehealth going forward is vitally important. Access to health services by people with a disability in regional, remote and indigenous communities supports them to maintain their independence as well as their community based living arrangements. Investment in health services, both face to face and telehealth is a cost effective investment when looking at the longer term impacts of people needing to be supported outside their local communities and support networks.

NDS believes that while **telehealth services should be used to enhance people's access to health services**, particularly in regional and remote areas, **it should not replace a person's access to face to face health care.**

NDS recommends that **Queensland Health be encouraged to use mainstream modalities in the delivery of telehealth services so that services can be delivered in the individual's own home.** Tablets and iPads are becoming familiar communication tools for many people with a disability, particularly people with a cognitive, intellectual and sensory disability. NDS recommends the Committee ensure that **the future development of telehealth services in Queensland includes a focus on using mainstream hardware familiar to people with a disability and accessible from their own home.** Maintaining a separate system with access limitations and failing to use commercially and publicly available hardware and software will limit the potential of telehealth services into the future.

NDS notes that the planning for future telehealth services will be constrained by the limitations of the current internet network in regional and remote Queensland. **Consideration should be given to recommending the Commonwealth government ensure equitable network access for people in regional and rural Queensland.**

Closing Comments

NDS Queensland is encouraged to hear that telehealth remains a strategic priority for the Queensland public health system. NDS would encourage the committee to ensure that the needs of people with a disability and the matters raised above are taken into consideration in the Inquiry and its recommendations.

NDS is willing to provide case examples to the committee in support of the above if required.