



# Telepalliative Care

Increasing access to palliative care via telehealth

## Overview

Palliative care provides physical, psychological and spiritual support for people with a terminal illness. Increasing the likelihood of a “good death”, palliative care is incredibly important for improved: quality of life; pain relief; care closer to home and; bereavement outcomes for family. For instance, 70% of Australians prefer to die at home but only 14% actually do. Palliative care assists people to die in their place of choice.

However, with 84% of palliative care teams being in major cities, palliative care access decreases with increasing remoteness. *Telehealth (especially videoconsultations and remote patient monitoring) allows palliative care teams to virtually reach into people's homes to provide support. The value of telehealth in increasing access to palliative care, for people with a terminal illness and their families, cannot be understated. Yet, in Australia, and globally, the challenge remains regarding how best to make telehealth a routine part of healthcare systems.* The benefits of telepalliative care are substantial, but implementation can be complex.

This research will:

- Expand Palliative Care ECHO (<https://uqecho.org/pallcare-echo/>) to allow more health professionals to join and interact. Palliative Care ECHO is a virtual mentoring program upskilling health professionals across Australia (especially in rural and remote) through monthly applied-teaching sessions with palliative care specialists;
- Leveraging off national partnerships, develop a website that maps services and provides information and resources for patients, caregivers and health professionals;
- Implement and evaluate telepalliative care services where needed.

## The Need

There is an urgent need to develop more innovative models of care to support palliative care and workforce capacity. The concentration of palliative care teams in cities yields numerous barriers for people in underserved regions including: workforce shortages; availability of qualified staff and; the need for education. This national research program will: upskill the primary health workforce regardless of location, increase the reach of palliative care and provide a one-stop-shop online resource for people with a terminal illness,

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caregivers and clinicians. This large-scale program of research will focus on the innovative use of communications technology to appropriately support people requiring access to specialist palliative care services. Building on my previous work in the field of telepalliative care and bringing together key stakeholders (health services personnel, consumers, community health services, government agencies) I will develop a national research plan which includes assessment of current state of play, stakeholder perspectives, prioritisation of needs, development and evaluation of interventions. The aim is to generate a body of research which informs future competitive funding applications through agencies like NHMRC and MRFF.

## Your Impact

Utilising successful telepalliative care models, this research will address unmet needs of people with a terminal illness and their families/caregivers. Expanding Palliative Care ECHO to include more monthly sessions will allow more health professionals to attend and interact so they can support people in their own communities. Improving access to palliative care can make an incredible difference to the person who is expecting to die, increasing the likelihood of a peaceful dying process, and have enormous impact on the people they leave behind who gain substantial comfort knowing that the person they supported had the care they needed. Dr Helen Haydon, a psychologist and early career researcher, will lead this work. Helen is a telehealth service expert who leads a growing program of telepalliative care projects. Through leading large projects such as: evaluation of a regional telepalliative care service, support and evaluation of two Queensland statewide telepalliative care services, development of the National Palliative Care ECHO service and; development of a brain tumour website for carers, Helen has excellent networks across Australia in palliative care, aged care and oncology. Yet, funding for palliative care research is limited, providing a barrier for Helen to grow this important work. Dedicated funding to progress this research will have an extremely positive benefit for many people in need.

## Thank you

If our project aligns with your interests, we'd be pleased to discuss our recent exciting findings, and honoured to have your support to advance this work to the next level.