

Telehealth Service Review: Frequently Asked Questions

24 July 2024

What is telehealth?

Telehealth is a broad umbrella term, and the NZ Telehealth Forum defines telehealth as “health care delivered using digital technology where participants may be separated by time and/or distance”.

There are different types of telehealth. For example, teletriage consists of call centre and other digital channels that provide basic health information, advice, and triage services to refer people to relevant resources and services. Healthline and other helplines, such as 1737, are predominantly teletriage.

Telecare or Virtual Care uses digital technology to support direct care beyond advice or referral, e.g. immediate urgent care, medication prescribing, symptom monitoring (verbal, online survey or use of remote monitoring devices), brief intervention, counselling, etc. The Rural Clinical Telehealth Service combines free teletriage and fee for service virtual medical consults.

What impact will the Telehealth Service Review have on Primary Care and Community Health services?

Telehealth services provide an important service option for whānau and communities across the health system. The review will explore areas where the National Telehealth Service, related services and other telehealth services can improve equity of access and outcomes and work better to support primary care and community health services. Feedback received on the interim findings report will further assist Health NZ plan any enhancements or changes to the provision of telehealth services.

Why is Health NZ undertaking the Telehealth Service Review now?

Telehealth services are an important option for primary care and community health service delivery, and it is timely to review current services and to plan further development, especially given that the National Telehealth Service contract is due to end on 30 June 2025.

What is the Telehealth Service Review timeframe and purpose?

The review is due to be completed in September 2024 and this will inform the development of a direction for telehealth services that will be responsive to future technological advances including an overarching procurement plan of telehealth services to improve equity of access and outcomes. It will also set the direction for the design and procurement approach of the National Telehealth Service, and other telehealth services. A final report to the Health NZ Board will be prepared by December 2024 that will incorporate feedback received on the interim findings report. No decisions on procurement of the National Telehealth Service will be made until December 2024.

What community and stakeholder engagement is planned?

The review includes a service user insights workstream that will seek input from five identified priority populations: rural communities, Māori, Pacific peoples, disabled people, and people aged over 65 years. Other stakeholders will be engaged throughout the review. We'll also consider the

experience and lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic about the benefits, challenges and improvements identified for telehealth consultations. An interim findings report will be made available for people to provide feedback on the review findings.

What impact will the Telehealth Service Review have on Healthline, 1737 Need to talk? and other helplines that are part of the National Telehealth Service?

There will be no immediate impact on these services, although service improvements are continually being assessed by Whakarongorau Aotearoa and Health NZ.

What impact will the Telehealth Service Review have on other telehealth services?

Any changes to current telehealth services will be managed as contracts are renewed using insights outlined in general review findings and a proposed telehealth service commissioning plan.