
Better Access to Medical Imaging in Torres and Cape First Nations Communities

Initiative Type

Model of Care

Status

Deliver

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Summary

In an effort to bring healthcare closer to home, the Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service (HHS) developed an allied health value-based health care approach, implementing an outreach

medical imaging service to eight remote First Nations communities. This is made possible through newer technologies that have been leveraged to allow high end mobile ultrasound to be performed. The model involves an experienced radiographer/sonographer, travelling to Cape York and Torres Strait communities, providing a service in clinics where patients have never had access to ultrasound imaging. These communities also had limited access to radiography via an x-ray operator service. An added benefit is that the new service provides onsite professional support to the x-ray operator of those communities.

Key dates

Sep 2022

Implementation sites

Torres and Cape HHS

Partnerships

Apunipima Cape York Health Council, the Cape York Kidney Care Team and the Royal Flying Doctor Service

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Aim

The aim is to address the gap in health inequity, using technology to deliver culturally informed medical imaging services closer to home.

Benefits

This service has already improved access to healthcare for these communities and enhanced the patient imaging experience of approximately 400 Queenslanders in a little over a year. This initiative is not only preferred by patients, but a cost analysis identified that there is significantly less expense incurred by the health service and by patients. It also has a measurable positive effect on the environment due to a reduction in carbon emissions.

Background

Patients living and working in the Torres Strait such as in Kowanyama that need a simple 20-minute scan are required you to take two to three days off work, arrange care for their kids, fly to Cairns, get a cab to some accommodation, travel to and from the appointment and then finally back to Kowanyama. Although the flights and accommodation are covered under the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme, food for those days is not covered and transport for you around Cairns is also not covered.

Solutions Implemented

- Provided medical imaging in community by experienced clinicians who are passionate about health equity and motivated to see those benefits expanded to as many remote communities as possible.
- Enabled greater choice for access to services through improved technology using high end mobile ultrasound imaging equipment under existing funding mechanisms.

Evaluation and Results

Prior to the service model implementation routine ultrasound utilisation rate across the remote communities was 43 scans per 1000 population. This rate was eight times lower than the Australian Average and clearly displays a measurable health inequality (Medicare Australia - Statistics - Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Group Statistics (humanservices.gov.au)). Following implementation, the utilisation rate exceeds 150 scans per 1000 of the population across those eight communities. It has also significantly decreased the failure to attend rates. In 2021, prior to the service model implementation the HHS spent \$439, 000 on patient travel on routine ultrasound imaging. Comparatively, under the new service model the cost is \$220,000 per annum (indicative). Also, there is now no cost incurred to the patient.

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