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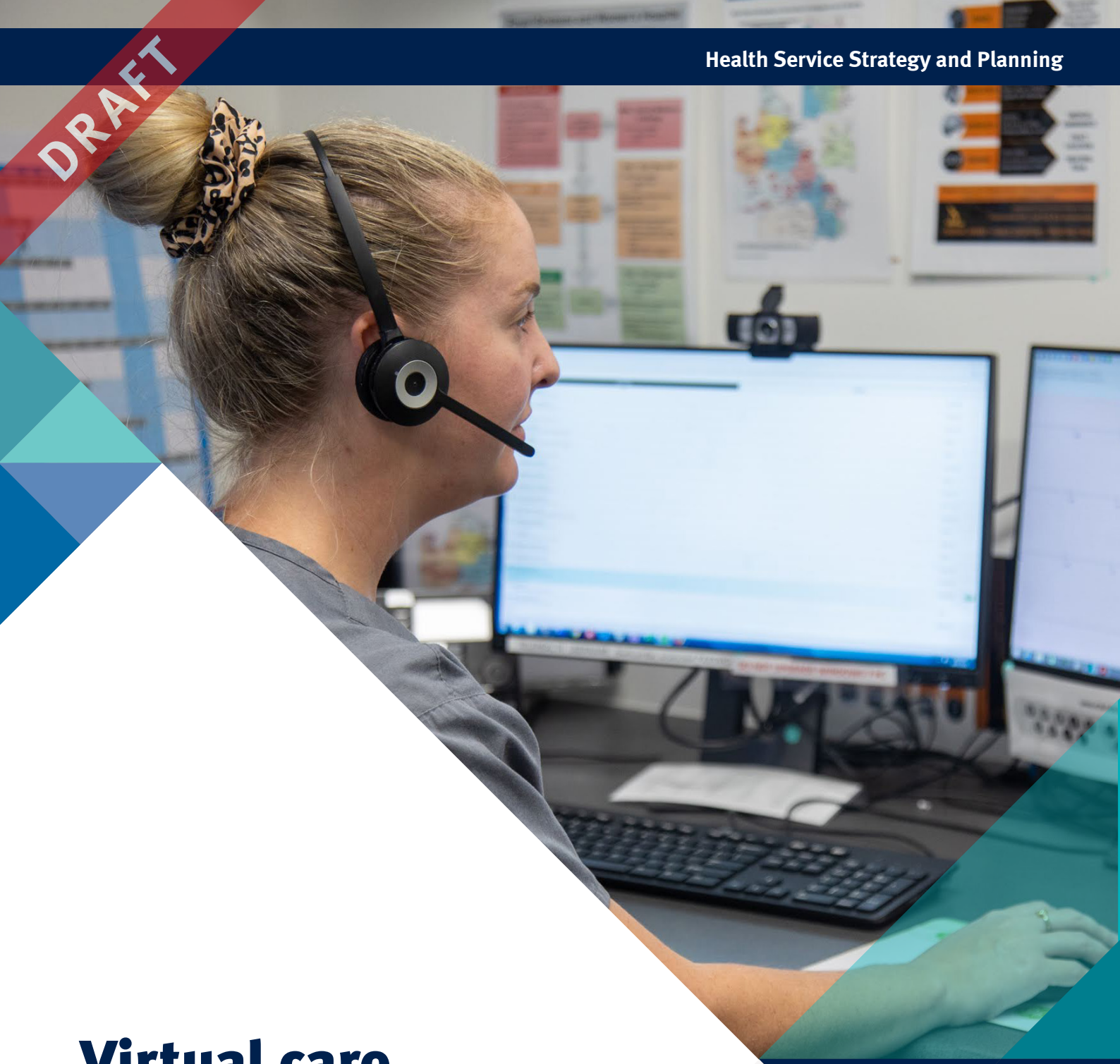

Virtual care in Metro North

Metro North
Hospital and Health Service

Queensland
Government

Context

The healthcare sector continues to evolve as health professionals and organisations look for ways to increase access for patients, improve outcomes and decrease the overall cost of healthcare. A key contributor to achieving this is enabling people to be active participants in their own well-being and be engaged to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Digital technology will also be a key enabler making it easier for healthcare professionals to communicate with their patients and connect people and information to support patients to have control of their health as well as breaking down the barriers that can impede a patient's access to healthcare.

As people become more and more connected to the Internet, virtual care is fast becoming a reliable, readily available modality for healthcare. Furthered by the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers are finding virtual care for a range of healthcare interactions to be safe, feasible, practical and efficient.

MN32 outlines our commitment to embrace technology to support evolving modes of care like virtual care. Metro North will develop virtual care models to support integrated, connected and contemporary care through digital solutions.

"For me virtual care is doing it online, not in person. Being away from the whole hospital and health environment. I realise virtual care is about the Telehealth. I still have not tried or been offered Telehealth. It's going to be nice to know a bit more about Telehealth when we're offered it."

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline what virtual care in Metro North means, how it can be used and what we intend to do to support implementation.

The aim of implementing a virtual care program in Metro North is simply to connect and empower our people (staff, patients and partners).

What is virtual care?

Terminology and using consistent language are important for a common understanding, application and realisation of outcomes and when using digital tools to partner with patients in healthcare.

"Virtual care encompasses a lot of different approaches. I use apps to monitor my fitness, but you can use apps to monitor your blood sugar or your blood pressure. I'm thinking of tests I've had in the past where I've had to wear a holter monitor and those results were digitally transmitted back to the medical professional, in real time to capture if something is wrong or you need to be alerted about."

Telehealth describes the use of any telecommunications technology to aid healthcare in order to improve a patient's health.

Virtual care is a broad term that refers to a healthcare delivery approach across the whole patient well-being lifecycle. Virtual care uses telehealth platforms and other Internet technology to provide remote, real-time care via live video conferences, audio and/or instant messaging. This enables patients to receive care in their location of choice, for example, at home, in their workplace or with in their local primary health service

Virtual care encompasses a range of remote patient management strategies include checking in after hospitalisation, talking about treatment plans, discussing surgery options, responding to questions about diagnoses or conditions, giving medical advice, supporting at-home exercises as well as telemedicine apps, which give patients access to care from their phones or tablets.

It's essentially the same ways in which health professionals and patients communicate in person, but instead conducted over the Internet.

Virtual care includes:

- Virtual consultations/interactions – patient-clinician and clinician-clinician, patient-clinician-clinician, patient-carer-clinician using video, diagnosis and treatment management (inpatient and outpatient), messaging conferencing tools to support diagnosis, self-care, counselling, multidisciplinary team meetings (MDTs), interventions i.e. rehabilitation
- Remote monitoring and supervision – devices that provide real-time data of key patient health indicators to enable ongoing monitoring, remote management, earlier discharge and emergency responses. Remote monitoring can complement referrals to pharmacy, family and friend support, and coordination with other health professionals

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- Coordination Centre – centralised hub, and clinical communication and workflow tools leveraging digital technology to enhance care delivery coordination in real time and improve patient flow decision making across the healthcare landscape
- Patient reported experience measures – tools and analytics which enable patients to provide direct, timely feedback about their health-related outcomes and experiences and medical data to drive improvement and integration of healthcare across the system
- Health literacy and virtual training – digital health content and tools to promote health education for patients and caregivers, and virtual training platforms (e.g. video, voice assistants, chatbots) for clinicians
- Communication channels - digital channels (e.g. SMS, websites, social media, chatbots, digital reality, voice) to direct patients to appropriate care settings, for triaging patient requests or peer-to-peer clinician collaboration such as General Practitioner advice and specialist support or second opinions
- Digital literacy – content and tools to support the use of digital technologies to deliver virtual care for health professionals, patients and other support people as well as an information to address privacy and confidentiality concerns related to digital technologies
- Digital care planning – a process of discussing care and treatment options with patients and mapping a plan for management of health issues in partnership with the patient or substitute decision makerand tracking services to provide holistic view of the patient journey across the care continuum, enhancing coordination, streamlining practice processes and improving quality of care

Why virtual care?

With broad implementation for appropriate services, virtual care has the potential to improve both the consumer and the health professional experience, as well as the quality and cost of care.

- **Improve clinical outcomes** – enhanced continuity of care and more robust data and analytics to inform decision making and tracking of performance, improve quality and help prevent downstream events, such as hospital admissions or readmissions
- **Enhance patient experience** – reduced patient effort and improved engagement with care pathway and adherence to treatment
- **Improve patient and clinician access** – improved speed of access to clinicians and care and level of care in the appropriate care settings due to lack of transport, geographical distance and fear of cross infection for people with comprised immunity and physical health limitations.
- **Improve efficiency** – efficiencies gained can increase productivity, reduce fail to attend rates, reduce patient travel and waiting times
- **Enhance care coordination** – expanded reach, connectivity and better workforce matching to patient need improves quality and safety and can reduce unnecessary referrals.

What we will do

To be successful, we need to ensure virtual health is approached consistently across Metro North. The following strategies will guide widespread implementation of virtual care in Metro North.

Strategy and governance	We will engage and align leadership, and develop governance structures to make decisions that drive towards a comprehensive virtual care program
Operations and workflow integration	We will adjust operational structure and staffing in order to integrate virtual care workflows into regular operations
Model of care design	We will integrate virtual care into a seamless delivery processes with coordinated care across services and settings
Financial	We will ensure structures and processes enable virtual care capabilities to promote financial viability, regulatory compliance, organisational advancement, and asset efficiency
Patient experience and engagement	We will respect patient preferences and offer choice and a differentiated virtual care experience, supported by education and communication of a clear value proposition to promote utilisation, patient support, and improved outcomes. We will ensure patient privacy and confidentiality. We will partner with other agencies to support implementation.
Data analytics	We will leverage innovative techniques to generate meaningful insights on virtual care usage and outcomes and enable process advancement through predictive analytics and cognitive capabilities
Technology infrastructure and interoperability	We will have integrated systems, processes, and technology infrastructure to support requirements and vision for virtually enabled models of care, in alignment with existing ICT and iEMR strategies
Workforce readiness and engagement	We will align clinicians and staff across Metro North to support and advance virtual care offerings with a focus on improving quality, patient experience, and cost effectiveness.

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