



A Customised Solution Maximises Rural Health Support

Organisation Background

The Grampians Rural Health Alliance (GRHA) situated in western Victoria comprises of 12 hospital-based health services, four bush nursing centres and several stand-alone community health centres. It supports improved regional health outcomes by providing technology, applications and communications solutions to connect the region's health services.

A project to establish the GRHA video conferencing service started in 2005 but in 2007 this was given a shot in the arm with the organisation receiving funding through the Clever Networks Innovative Services Delivery Program from the Department of Broadband, Communication and Digital Economy.

Clever Health is aimed at delivering increased levels of patient care and staff support by linking the patients in a region with high quality expertise via wireless and video conference technology and associated specialist equipment. The aim today for GRHA's video conferencing network is to deliver more effective patient treatment and better peer support for clinicians by sharing expertise and resources across a broadband video conference network. This in turn links more than 40 health facilities in Western Victoria.



The big picture

With limited numbers of specialised healthcare resources and the large rural area of the Grampians to support, the region's health services needed to maximise its resources in order to provide more effective patient treatment. This was achieved through the Grampians Rural Health Alliance and the establishment of the customised video conferencing network to support healthcare.

As an example, there may only be one after-hours General Practitioner supporting two townships quite a distance apart. With video conferencing, after-hours emergency care can be delivered quicker making it easier on the doctors who are on call because now they don't have to drive to the next township to provide care – giving a whole new meaning to making house calls!

To support GRHA's requirements for a specialised healthcare video conferencing network, GRHA turned to Melbourne-headquartered Telstra iVision after a review in which it determined that the company had the experience, skills and commitment to build and support the GRHA video conferencing network on an ongoing basis.

"Telstra iVision was selected as a partner in the Clever Health project by Grampians Rural Health Alliance due to its experience in implementing and integrating video conferencing solutions on converged networks and the company's focus on the simplified user experience. They have proven capabilities in understanding the requirements of the end users and designing innovative solutions that meet these needs," says David Ryan, Executive Officer of GRHA.

Over time, Telstra iVision in its role as architect and systems integrator has provided GRHA's video conferencing network with consultancy, implementation, integration and managed services thereby ensuring the program's ongoing success.



The Solution

Telstra iVision's approach was consultative when designing the right solution. Understanding that ease of use and mobility, were primary factors for GRHA, Telstra iVision oversaw the design and development of the highly customized, integrated and mobile MediLink video conferencing units. Based on TANDBERG technology, Telstra iVision deployed 17 of the customised MediLink video conferencing units that include integrated digital cameras. In addition to the MediLink systems, Telstra iVision was responsible for the project management and implementation of TANDBERG hardware equipment and infrastructure for a total deployment of 100 video conferencing units across GRHA ensuring that every health service and community health centre has state of the art videoconferencing facilities for patient care and professionals.

The MediLink video conferencing units have proven instrumental in encouraging use by the clinicians. The mobility and simplicity of the 17 MediLink units deployed to date have made them particularly suitable for clinical support, supervision and mentoring. In addition to their installation in emergency departments, the units are being used by acute care nurses and district nurses to consult with wound care specialists on the needs of individual patients. Ultimately, the MediLink systems will enable health services to provide patients with immediate care – using specialists typically not available in remote areas.

The Results

Improved psychiatric support, patient discharge planning sessions, access to dialysis support nurses and wound care consultants, and more flexible staff training options are among the main changes attributable to the Grampians Rural Health Alliance video conferencing deployment.

More than 1,200 hours of video conferencing are being notched up on the network each quarter and this figure is growing exponentially. For example, video conferencing usage for the October-December quarter 2009 increased approx 43% over the previous quarter. Scheduled conferences increased approximately 35% to 699 over the last quarter, while ad-hoc conferences increased by 50%.

The increase in the ad hoc videoconference is particularly significant because this service is used more frequently by clinicians for clinical support, supervision and mentoring.

Video conferencing demand was also strong among the region's psychiatric services which are increasingly relying on video conferencing for staff meetings, training, exam preparation and student supervision.

Another growth area is among health agencies with multiple campuses. During the past year such agencies have recorded a 400% increase in use of the video conferencing service, citing the need to involve staff in planning while reducing the need to routinely travel extended distances.

"The increased usage and adoption of video conferencing is a result of the consultative approach, integration and managed services from Telstra iVision," says Ryan.



What next?

Discussions with senior staff have indicated that the videoconference network is now seen as integral to the way they do business with all staff required to participate in videoconference meetings and training.

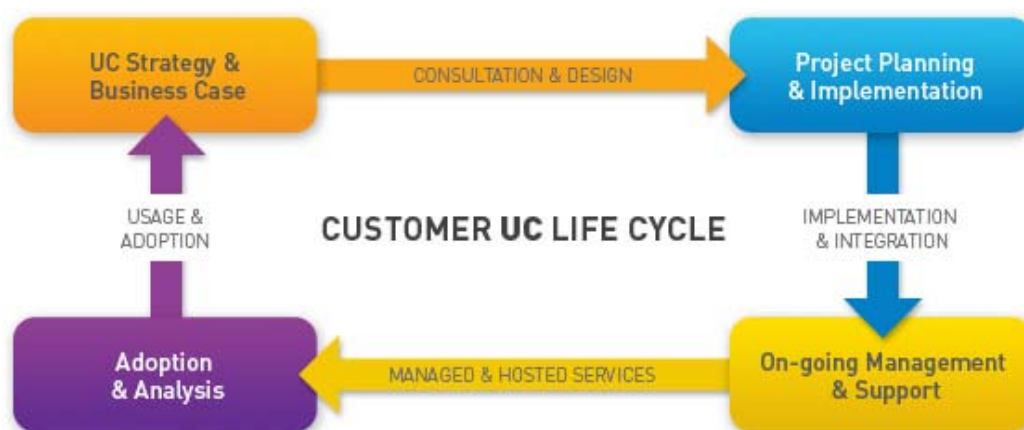
As a result, more than 1,800 staff have used the network to participate in e-learning courses. E-learning is proving to be an important component of the Clever Health project, delivering significant productivity gains by reducing staff travel time and costs, and removing the need to replace staff on the floor while they attend training.

Moreover, the service is increasingly being used to conduct patient care conferences and to bring together agencies and families when planning patient discharges. This is reducing travel demands on staff and enabling more effective coordinated support for patients and their families.

By increasing awareness, supporting and encouraging the use of video conferencing, the GRHA team has been able to increase the usage of the units significantly.

“When asked about their use of videoconferencing, our managers said that they use the video conferencing network just like the telephone. It saves significant amounts of time in travelling and improves the communication between the sites. All you need to do is ensure that the system is turned on and it works thanks to the relationship which we have with Telstra iVision in helping us to establish a rural clinical support network,” says Ryan.

Moving forward, GRHA will be able to deploy further video conferencing units simply through Telstra iVision to the individual health services through the use of stable connections and the maintenance of the GRHA private health network.



Key Services

Of the 5-key service areas that Telstra iVision provides, the following were provided:

- Consultation
- Implementation and Integration
- Managed Services
- Usage and Adoption

With every customer, Telstra iVision’s approach is always with service first, technology second.