

26<sup>th</sup> October 2017

## **Sustainable Health Review: Submission by Linkwest**

Linkwest strongly recommends that the WA state government investigates utilising the existing infrastructure, community connections and technology provided by 106 regionally based Community Resource Centres (CRCs) to provide patient centred, cost effective health services to regional WA communities.

Linkwest <http://www.linkwest.asn.au/> is the peak body for Neighbourhood and Community Resource Centres in Western Australia. We represent 106 CRCs (funded by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development) <http://www.crc.net.au/Our-Network/Our-Centres/Pages/default.aspx> located across regional and remote WA. The majority of CRCs are based in small, low population towns which have little to no services provided locally, with 47% of CRCs being located in communities with populations below 500 people. In terms of issues affecting the 106 communities represented by CRCs, “lack of access to services such as health and education” has been identified as a priority by 33% of CRCs.

Each CRC has been equipped with state of the art video conferencing hardware. In addition, the state government is currently paying for each CRC to hold a licence for a supported video conferencing platform. This secure platform enables CRCs to connect a range of service providers directly to their communities for either group sessions or individual support. This is a platform that has already been used to deliver successful telehealth programs. The Women’s Health and Family Service has used this platform to deliver health education and counselling via CRCs through its Rural in Reach program for a number of years. <http://www.ruralinreach.whfs.org.au/> sadly this program lost funding but was popular with regional communities and in many cases offered communities the only health education workshops available.

Other health related activities the VC platform have been used for are;

- Pre op prep check between a patient and anaesthetist
- Consult checking in on patient after minor surgery
- Mental health first aid sessions-
- Counselling for new mothers provided by Ngala parenting services
- Foodbank has delivered healthy eating practical workshops from Perth metro to a number of CRCs at the same time

Whilst not a health related provider, Skill Hire is currently using video conferencing in CRCs to reach clients in work search activities. Skill Hire see the additional benefits of meeting their clients through CRCs via VC because it brings their clients into a community hub and links them to other services, community groups and people.



In addition to health related activities run via VC, CRCs work with partners to undertake a lot of work in the area of community wellness. The types of activities CRCs run include Men's Health Expos, Women's Health Expos, and Beyond Blue days.

Other on site health services offered through our regional members are;

Weekly scheduled nurse clinics at the CRC

Drug and Alcohol counsellors

Child health nurses

Bremer Bay CRC provides the space for the local pharmacy

In addition to having state of the art technology already in place, each CRC is a local community hub. They are community led, place based, grass root organisations with multiple networks, relationships, partnerships and significant social capital. Many different community activities and events are run by the CRCs giving people a place to connect. They are a safe, welcoming, well known place in the community.

This places the CRCs in the perfect position to support the Department of Health and WA Primary Health Alliance in primary health and allied care through strong referral programs with the local GP/Medical service, mental health action teams and targeted programs.

Whilst the CRC network cannot offer emergency services it can offer the WA Department of Health;

**Patient first** – providing a safe and trusted space for local community to access innovative face-to-face services; offering information and referral services to enable people to make informed decision as well as access preventative assistance. Note: This is critical for aged and the most disadvantaged, as most small communities do not have access to public transport, and many don't have access to reliable, cost-effective internet.

**Value for money** – This is infrastructure, technology and social capital that already exists. There will be no set up costs. There will be significant ongoing cost savings to the department using VC by reducing travel and accommodation costs for both patients and service providers. Improved information, community education and referrals will facilitate early intervention and prevention reducing costs for the Health Department. Reducing the costs of health in many other areas including voluntary services such as St John's Ambulance, and ultimately will decrease hospital admissions. Finally, bringing isolated people into a community hub will increase their social connections and may result in attending other activities and events being held at the local CRC.

**Healthy lifestyles** – delivery of healthy workshops by metro based specialist organisations as previously offered by the Rural in Reach program. For example, one specialist such as a diabetes educator could in one workshop deliver to multiple CRCs and their communities via video



conferencing. The workshops are supported by local CRCs by promoting to the community, providing materials, and hosting the event to achieve far greater outcomes than if promotion was by an out of town organisation. As CRCs act as a hub for other community groups they often provide a free space for the local drug action groups, self help and support groups, that might also benefit from additional workshops and programs delivered from out of town.

**Partnerships across sectors** – Linkwest continues to foster partnerships across both the community sector and government to deliver services via CRCs into the local communities. Parenting service providers are increasingly delivering parenting workshops via VC to CRCs communities. In addition, each centre has multiple, strategic partnerships with local government, community groups, and state and federal government. This includes dozens of self help and support groups, playgroups, community gardens, Mens Sheds that facilitate wellbeing. An example of the multiple community partners one CRC might have would be Pingelly CRC <http://www.pingelly.crc.net.au/community-groups.html> This does not include the partnerships with local government, universities, local businesses, state and federal government etc. For example Pingelly CRC is working with the WAPHA on a drug, alcohol and mental health strategy for the local community.

In addition, Linkwest as the peak could partner with WA Health to work with and across the network. We provide regular community education and training to our member Centres via video conference, a weekly eBulletin that reaches 1000 addresses of mostly community run organisations, Linkwest runs a state wide conference every other year which enables service providers to promote and connect with our network either with stands, sponsorship, and workshops showcasing partnerships and how they have benefited the community. At the 2017 Conference held in October we had 200 delegates representing 92 Centres which represents 92 different communities across WA. There were approximately 140 regional representatives from Centres from Wyndham to Esperance made possible by a grant from Lotterywest. The WAPHA was a sponsor recognising the importance of this network to community wellbeing.

Linkwest as the peak also has partnerships and relationships with other peaks in the health and mental health sector.

**Technology and innovation** – The network already has a fully-functioning, industry standard encryption video conferencing platform that is trusted by the most security conscious industries including healthcare, financial services and the military. The Vidyo platform has been in use by many CRCs for nearly 10 years. Most CRC coordinators are experienced users of the software and hardware. In addition, the current contract provides back up support from a locally based provider who is able to link the current WA Health VC system with the CRC system. The courts also use VC via CRCs occasionally to save money on transporting witnesses into Perth.

The significant advantage this opportunity provides is the human real time face to face support provided in a friendly facility and by the service provider. It is not like trying to use Skype were individuals have to muddle through with no help.





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**Social capital** –This is something that is difficult to measure, but clearly evident as many CRCs have been in their communities for decades and they have continued to adapt to changing needs. In many cases the centres relationships with WA's most disadvantaged are strong and they are in best place to help. 60 of our regional Centres also offer Centrelink access points or agencies therefore they are already have good relationships with the most disadvantaged in the local community. Many of our Centres have been in their communities for over 25 years. They have generational relationships and networks, local investment, trust and community knowledge held by the staff and volunteers. The CRC staff and volunteers are usually the first in the community to be aware of an individual, family or section of the community in crisis and will be the instigators in pulling together a community response. It might be meals for a family, driving someone to the nearest hospital, town etc.. or running suicide awareness and prevention training at the Centre.

### **Other considerations;**

CRCs are committed to developing regional communities and connecting the people of regional WA to much needed services. CRCs provide training and education programs, and information on regional and government services, while undertaking continued community and capacity building activities. They are Community RESOURCE Centres. They are there to address needs in the local community with whatever resources they can to fill that gap.

Small communities are at a major disadvantage in regard to accessing services due to the tyranny of distance and **NO** access to public transport. No everyone can afford unlimited mobile phone plans, can access the internet, or can afford to drive to the nearest health centre, hospital. The most disadvantaged are even more disadvantaged in regional WA.

The use of CRCs by WA Health would value add to the CRCs by adding to the services they already offer their communities. It would also value add to the communities by bringing another vital service into the local community hub.

If these community resources are not recognised and used by government and other service providers they will be lost to their communities with devastating consequences to community wellbeing and sustainability plus the lost opportunity to government to connect directly with these communities and provide cost effective services and information. This connection also offers government a cost effective opportunity to gather local community knowledge, identify local emerging issues and work with a local organisation which is a local change agent.

CRCs have the ability to pilot projects so that you can measure the outcomes of for both the department and the client/patient and community. CRCs are able to collect relevant data and support the continuous improvement of services.

### **Further information;**

In addition to the CRC network Linkwest is also the peak body for neighbourhood centres. There is a further 50 of these community run, place based organisations that also offer the potential to connect and deliver services into their communities. Currently, these Centres do are not using the VC platform. However, as Linkwest hosts the platform it would only take a small investment in time

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and hardware for these organisations to also be able to provide this opportunity to their local communities.

Finally, Linkwest would like to see a whole of government strategy into the use of high quality video conferencing to deliver community services into regional and remote communities. Linkwest is the only peak that can offer government this access into over 100 regional communities in WA. The social capital, community connections, building infrastructure, trained staff and technology are all already in place. The Linkwest network offers the WA State Government an opportunity to build on this valuable resource to deliver health services to regional communities in a cost effective and patient centre manner.

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