

# Northern Health

## GP Newsletter

October 2020



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## Northern Health Update

Working in the northern Melbourne catchment, I am continuously reminded of the enthusiasm and commitment, across the whole system, to collaborating to support our community. There are so many organisations – spanning across acute, community, primary care and other not for profit entities – that demonstrate their passion for working together on a day to day basis.



We are all familiar with the multiple and complicated funding streams sitting across each segment of the Australian care system. We are also all equally aware that the boundaries of these funding streams sometimes create cracks in our system that allow our patients to slip through. It's a bit like our 'stepped care' models have a chasm between each level or 'step' of the care system.

For that reason I am a big believer that that partnerships and collaboration are key to improving overall health outcomes for our northern community. And I am grateful for the contribution that each of you provides to working *together* in the north.

In particular, this month I'd like to recognise the General Practitioners (GPs) who have been providing their time in the Northern Health GP Advisory Group (see page 9). We are extremely appreciative for the insight and advice provided by this group and we find the opportunity to collaborate highly productive and beneficial.

You may also notice an increasing focus on using digital solutions to connect us all across the system. In this addition of our newsletter, we have included information about reaching patients through video-consultation (see pages 3 and 8), as well as utilising e-referral for GPs to refer patients to Specialist Clinics (see page 3). Finally, we are very excited to share with you some information about our new Virtual ED-Triage service (see page 2). We believe this Australian-first service will help us to connect with patients in our catchment, as well as our GP colleagues.

**Ms Briana Baass** FCHSM MAICD  
PARTNERSHIPS | NORTHERN HEALTH

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Epping Vic 3076

Broadmeadows Hospital  
35 Johnstone Street  
Broadmeadows Vic 3047

Bundoora Centre  
1231 Plenty Road  
Bundoora Vic 3083

Craigieburn Centre  
274-304 Craigieburn Road  
Craigieburn Vic 3064

# Australian-first Virtual ED Triage Launches for Patients and General Practitioners

Patients living in Northern Health's catchment area, as well as local general practitioners (GPs), will be able to use our new 'Virtual ED Triage' service from today. This Australian-first service will be available every day, including weekends from 1 pm to 9.30 pm. Dr Loren Sher, Emergency Physician, explained this service will enable patients to talk to our emergency department (ED) nurses and doctors from their home, work or even their car.

"If a patient has a non-life threatening emergency, they can connect virtually with our ED staff, who will be able to provide medical advice. Patients will need to have a valid Medicare card and be comfortable speaking in English, as interpreting isn't currently available for this particular service."

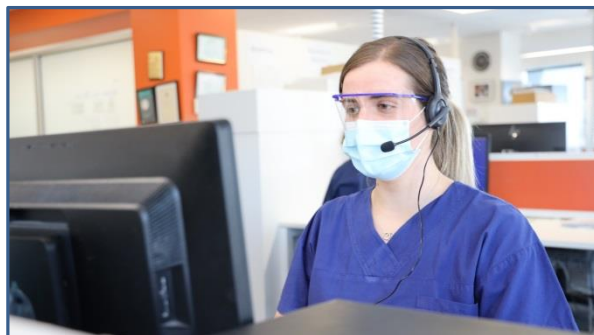
By clicking on the link or using the QR code, patients will be directed to the registration page. Once registered, the patient will be placed in a virtual waiting room and when it's their turn, the nurse will have an online consultation with the patient and advise on the best course of action.

As a public hospital, we are the first in Australia to offer the model for patients to self-present to ED virtually.

The new service will also benefit local GPs and acute care centres, helping general practitioners manage patients in the community, and keep people closer to home.

The program works with GPs and community health care providers to identify patients that traditionally would have been referred to ED, but may be suitable for ongoing management in the community, with ED consultation. We are hoping to establish a mutual relationship where GPs can have consultations with us regarding complicated patients, and we are hoping also to refer virtual triage patients to their practices for follow-up.

The virtual ED triage model aims to address the issues of physical distancing in waiting rooms and provide an alternative for patients who do not need to present to the ED for non-life threatening emergencies.



Northern Health triage nurses are postgraduate trained and have unique skills to make time-sensitive clinical decisions, think critically and identify patient problems, ensuring our patients get the right care, at the right time.

As front line health care workers, we were exploring and looking for innovative ways to deliver timely care to our patients within the community. Northern Hospital has the busiest emergency department in Victoria and the third busiest in the country. The hospital is in a growth corridor and is expected to see continuing increases in presentations over the coming years. A successful virtual triage and medical management will help our patients get the care they need, without coming to hospital.

## GP and Patient Information Sheets

Now available for download on the Northern Health website.

Go to the Emergency Department service page:

<https://www.nh.org.au/service/emergency-department/#hp>

GP How to Guide [click here](#)

## Haematology GP Advice Hotline 8405 2596

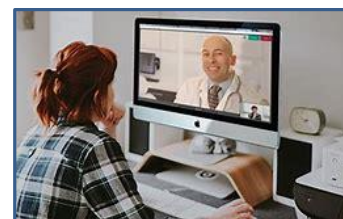
The hotline is available from **9.30am–3.30pm (Monday–Friday)** through our laboratory haematology team at Northern Pathology Victoria.

For urgent queries outside these hours, please contact the Clinical Haematology Registrar via Northern Health switchboard on **8405 8000**

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## Telehealth Readiness Survey

Northern Health has commenced using Telehealth for its outpatient service as a response to COVID 19. As part of the Northern Health Telehealth strategy, GP telehealth readiness is seen as a key item not just for Telehealth but for the technology and digital transformation that Northern Health is working towards achieving.



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As the new Chief Medical Officer (CMO) I am really keen to work collaboratively with our GPs and the Primary Health Networks to provide seamless and safe care for patients wherever they are in their health journey and to support the use of technology where possible.

We invite GPs who refer to Northern Health to complete this survey by the 26th October as it is really important for Northern Health to understand the most effective way to support and work with you, the GPs of the northern community, during our digital transformation. [Click here to complete survey](#)

*Ms Wanda Stelmach  
Chief Medical Officer Northern Health*

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## Northern Health Switches to Electronic Healthlinks for GP eReferrals to Specialist Clinics

As of 1<sup>st</sup> October, Northern Health Specialist Clinics has switched to HealthLink SmartForms as the standard platform for accepting GP referrals.

HealthLink SmartForms are widely used across Victoria and are available for GPs using Medical Director, Best Practice and Genie software. The electronic transmission has been proven to be highly reliable compared to fax.

**For more information** about how you can send your referrals to Northern Health Specialist Clinics using HealthLink SmartForms, please contact Christopher Daniel, GP Support at Northern Health Specialist Clinics on 8405 8815, email [Christopher.Daniel@nh.org.au](mailto:Christopher.Daniel@nh.org.au) or go to our website [link](#)

## Post-Covid Normal at Northern Health: Covid+ Community Monitoring Service

Northern Health established a **Covid+ Community Monitoring Service** to support and monitor persons who tested positive to SARS-CoV-2 virus and, along with their household family members were required to self-isolate at home.

In brief, this service has used senior nursing and allied health staff redeployed from patient facing roles in ED and ICU to establish a call-centre operating during business hours, seven days per week. The service involves assessment of social and healthcare status and risk stratification to determine the level of telephone monitoring for the duration of the period of self-isolation. Clearance from isolation remains a DHHS responsibility.

If deterioration in clinical status is detected in response to daily or second daily phone calls, patients are advised to call 000 and present to hospital. In addition to monitoring for clinical deterioration, the service also identifies social needs and provides an in-reach service to provide instruction in the basics of Covid-safe social practices including hand hygiene, wearing masks, social distancing and surface cleaning. The monitoring service works with the patients GP to ensure that the GP is aware of the patient status.

Any active medical issues are referred to the patient's own GP. Over 900 patients have been supported since July 21. The service now continues in a much-reduced capacity.

Off the back of the community monitoring program a post discharge call is made at two weeks, and a screening questionnaire administered examining for ongoing symptoms. Where ongoing clinical conditions are identified, the patient's GP is informed and where appropriate, patients offered a referral to a **Post-Acute Covid (Long Covid) Clinical Service** run by Dr David Feng, respiratory physician and Mr Peter Yung, rehabilitation physiotherapist.

Approximately 20% of patients experience ongoing symptoms at 30 days post diagnosis, involving chiefly but not limited to malaise and limitation of usual daily activities. The post-acute Covid clinical syndromes are becoming better understood. A multi-disciplinary approach is ideal for the assessment and management of patients who experience prolonged symptoms and or delayed recovery.

*Don Campbell  
Medical Division Director Hospital Without Walls  
Clinical Service Director Staying Well Program*

## Advance Care Planning

Northern Health welcomes James Watt as the new Advance Care Planning Program Manager. James has an extensive background in palliative care nursing and joins Dr Barbara Hayes, Clinical Lead for Advance Care Planning. As well as supporting Northern Health, James and Barbara can also support general practitioners and community members with education about Advance Care Planning.

Northern Health aim to increase awareness of Advance Care Planning among residents in Melbourne's north and to help build the capacity of general practice to undertake advance care planning with their patients. James and Barbara are available to deliver (on-line at present) education sessions to GPs and Practice Nurses.

**Contact:** James Watt (03) 9495 3235 or [james.watt@nh.org.au](mailto:james.watt@nh.org.au).

**For more information** about Advance Care Planning go to our website: [www.nh.org.au/advance-care-planning](http://www.nh.org.au/advance-care-planning).



# Post Covid Normal at Northern Health: Patient Watch

**Patient Watch** is a new service being implemented at Northern Health as an additional component of its broader effort to reduce avoidable hospitalisations. This service is for patients who are identified as being at risk of 3 or more admissions to hospital in the next 12 months. This group constitutes the top 2% of admitted persons who account for 25% of direct health care costs which is a widely recognised phenomenon.

The mission is to keep an eye on vulnerable patients at home and help them stay as healthy as possible and out of hospital by working to anticipate or support persons who are identified as being at risk of deterioration in their clinical status and presentation/admission to hospital. Close working relationships will be established with each person's GP, who remains the conductor of the orchestra. It is anticipated that several thousand such patients will eventually be enrolled on this program each year.

Patient Watch performs five core functions:

**Screening** patients identified by an algorithm to determine if they may benefit from the service. This is a knockout process – for example Patient Watch is not appropriate for people living in Residential Aged Care. Or a patient may be in regular contact with another service so Patient Watch would only impose undue burden.

**Explaining, offering and inducing patients** into Patient Watch. Participation is voluntary and patients can stop and restart as they see fit, subject to meeting participation requirements. All patients are required to sign a participation agreement, consent to information sharing with their care providers, and may nominate another person e.g. their carer to assist with contact calls with that person's consent.

**Monitoring** at regular intervals (typically weekly) the health state of participants for a minimum of three months and potentially years. Telephone monitoring is conducted by trained Tele-Navigators (Lay or Division 2 Nurses) under close clinical supervision in a Call Centre located at Broadmeadows Hospital.

Telephone monitoring is underpinned by an integrated proprietary contact management, decision support and problem/action tracking applications.

During operating hours, participating patients or their carers can call Patient Watch to ask questions or request assistance.

**Formulating problems and taking actions** in response to signs of possibly health decline detected by the monitoring process. This work is undertaken by Patient Watch Health Coaches (experienced senior nurses and allied health clinicians with both acute and community care expertise) who provide both reactive and proactive care and support. Health Coaches work hand in hand with a wide array of Northern Health and external services providers. The patient's GP remains the conductor of care in the community.

**Periodic reviews** (quarterly or thereabouts) are conducted by the patient Health Coach to determine if a patient's health has sufficiently stabilised to enable graduation from the program or adjustment of monitoring. This is a data supported clinical judgment taken with involvement of the patient. Patients who are clearly not benefiting from Patient Watch may choose to stop or may be stopped by the Patient Watch team and offered more suitable services.

The Patient Watch Call Centre operates between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday. It is closed on Weekends and Public Holidays. Patient Watch is not an emergency service. Patients use emergency services as they normally would. Suitably credentialed Northern Health medical staff will provide decision support to the Patient Watch clinicians. The patients GP will be the most frequent route for medical advice and intervention.

*Don Campbell  
Medical Division Director  
Hospital Without Walls  
Clinical Service Director Staying  
Well Program*



## Research at Northern Health

As part of the Northern Health 'family' we want to let GPs know the exciting developments that have been made in our research portfolio over the last 12 months. Research is one of the three pillars of any health system along with safe and high quality health care delivery, and the education of the next generation of health practitioners. Without these three pillars we will not be able to serve our community as we should.

As general practitioners play a critical role in delivering quality health care to our community, we are keen to involve you in our research activities. This may be by participating in clinical trials with your patients, attending our research activities, which includes research rounds or working with us to develop your own research activities. Our research portfolio has expanded rapidly with projects across our specialty units in medicine, and also increasingly involve nursing and the full range of allied health practitioners.

Northern Health are expanding our interests in health services research – how we can better deliver health services and looking at new models of health care. Many of these projects involve our Academic Health Partners – the University of Melbourne, LaTrobe University, RMIT University and Swinburne University of Technology.

With Covid 19 we are coordinating a number of clinical trials and also conducting exciting projects around how can we better communicate with our diverse ethnic community about the virus, where this information is sourced and how we might improve communication.

This study is part of a larger interest in health literacy which is so important for patients to take a greater role in their own care.

Northern Health is the major partner in the recently announced *NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Interactive Digital Technology to Transform Australia's Chronic Disease Outcomes*. This project provides a major opportunity for Melbourne's north to become the focus for digital health research and link with international research groups to be at the forefront of health service transformation. It will also significantly enhance our Staying Well program by utilising patient interactive digital technology to transform the way care is delivered for those living with chronic disease, which has important implications for general practice.

This month we hosted our annual Research week. This year it was conducted as a virtual event. Please see our [website](#) to view the recordings of the broad range of projects and research activities that we were involved with.

Regular Research Rounds with local and visiting speakers are conducted which GPs are always welcome to join.

If you are interested in participating in any of these activities please get in touch.

More information is available on our website: <https://www.nh.org.au/research-and-education/research/>



*Prof Peter Brooks  
Medical Lead - Research*

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## Northern Health Website

[www.nh.org.au](http://www.nh.org.au)

## Hospitals and Patients Working in Unity (*HOW-R-U?*)



Northern Health is commencing a new program aimed to help support patients experiencing social isolation, loneliness and depression.

This program, in conjunction with Bolton Clarke and Friends for Good, uses volunteer telephone support to provide social connection to patients discharged from Northern Hospital. The calls occur once a week with the aim of maintaining patient's social connection and improve their mental health and wellbeing. Calls are social in nature and do not provide clinical support or counselling.

This program is of particular importance during the pandemic, where many patients will be isolating at higher rates of the community in order to protect themselves from the virus.

This program is supported by funding from the Better Care Victoria Innovation Fund.

For any queries regarding the *HOW-R-U?* program, please contact [howru@boltonclarke.com.au](mailto:howru@boltonclarke.com.au)

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## Refugee Health Navigation – a project for the outer north

We often talk about improving the health literacy of people from refugee backgrounds, but an East Melbourne PHN-funded project, based at Northern Health, is finding this is a two-way street.

The Refugee Health Navigation is looking at how people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds navigate our health system and seeking to pinpoint areas for improvement.



In recent consultations with Assyrian community members around Hume and Whittlesea, some ideas were very simple.

“In Syria, we don't have this GP care. When we see the doctor, he listened and gave medication but he didn't write on the computer. Here, the doctor is always looking at the computer, not looking at the person”.

In Australia, anyone over 40 can recall a time before large clinics and computers in general practice, so this might go some way to understanding the experience of people who have arrived from countries with different systems, often after many years' displacement in refugee camps and other transitional places.

The Refugee Health Navigation project is working with communities in the Outer North to co-design resources that they hope will be of use to their communities and the health professionals that treat them.

If you have patients from refugee backgrounds and would like to contribute or be consulted, please contact: Janet Pelly at [janet.pelly@nh.org.au](mailto:janet.pelly@nh.org.au)

# Northern Health Digital Technology Update For GPs

COVID-19 has caused significant changes to the healthcare system. Consequently, general practice in the north and east of Melbourne are now relying heavily on digital more than ever.

This CPD event will demonstrate some of the features of digital health tools and how their adoption will assist to ensure patients have timely access to clinical services during a pandemic.

## Presenters

**Vandana Chandnani** – Manager, Provider Adoption – Australian Digital Health Agency

**Tracey Webster** – Telehealth Project Officer, Northern Health

**Lawrence Peterson** – Lead Technical Analyst – Customer Service and Deployment, HealthLink

**Christopher Daniel** – Specialist Clinics Project Officer – eReferrals, Northern Health

## Learning outcomes

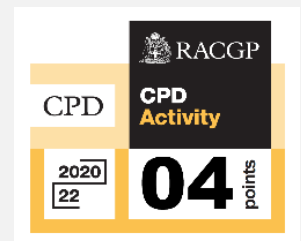
- identify the key elements to electronic prescriptions and My Health Record
- outline the requirements for conducting telehealth consultations
- describe the steps involved in sending an electronic referral to Northern Health Specialist Clinics using HealthLink
- using secure messaging delivery for communication of clinical information in preference to other non-secure channels such as fax or email.

## Event details

**Date:** Thursday 29 October 2020

**Online:** [registration link](#)

**Time:** 6.30-8.30pm

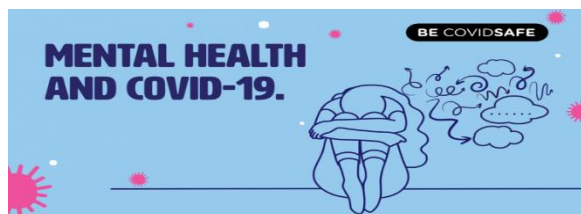


Northern Health





# Medicare Subsidised Psychology Sessions Doubles from 10 to 20



Northern Health welcomes the news that Australian Government will now provide up to 20 Medicare subsidised psychological therapy sessions per year for people impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

With a Medicare **Mental Health Treatment Plan** (MHCP) patients could already claim rebates on up to individual 10 sessions with a psychologist at a time. From 9 October 2020 until 30 June 2022 an extra 10 sessions can be accessed if mental health has been impacted by COVID-19.

The *Better Access to Psychologists Medicare Benefits Schedule* covers people with concerns such as adjustment disorder, chronic fatigue, depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, alcohol use disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder and sleep problems, just to name a few.

To be eligible, a patient must have:

- A Mental Health Treatment Plan developed by their GP
- Have used their initial 10 individual Better Access sessions before they seek a referral for additional sessions
- A referral from their treating psychologist

For help with finding appropriate Medicare psychologist providers for patients, GPs can use the [Find a Psychologist](#) search function on the Australian Psychological Society (APS) website, where it is possible to filter by specific mental health concern and location amongst other terms. What mental health disorders can be treated under the Better Access initiative?

Further information:

[Factsheet-10MentalHealthSessions](#)

*Dr Brooke Froud-Cummins  
Psychology Clinical Leader  
Northern Health*

## GP Advisory Group

As part of Northern Health's 2020 strategic plan, we have a commitment to create healthier communities through active partnership with our community and other service providers for out of hospital supports.

General Practitioners play a key role in providing care for our community and we would like to strengthen our relationship with our local GPs, by establishing a GP Advisory Group for Northern Health.

Should you be interested in joining this group, or have an interest in becoming involved in a variety of projects that Northern Health is currently undertaking involving partnership with our community providers, then please **contact Karen Overall** via email: [primarycareliaison@nh.org.au](mailto:primarycareliaison@nh.org.au)

### The Primary Care Liaison Team

Briana Baass	Chief Allied Health Officer & Partnerships
Sharryn Beard	Partnerships Officer
Karen Overall	Primary Care Liaison Officer

### Contact

T: 9495 3140  
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W: [www.nh.org.au](http://www.nh.org.au)