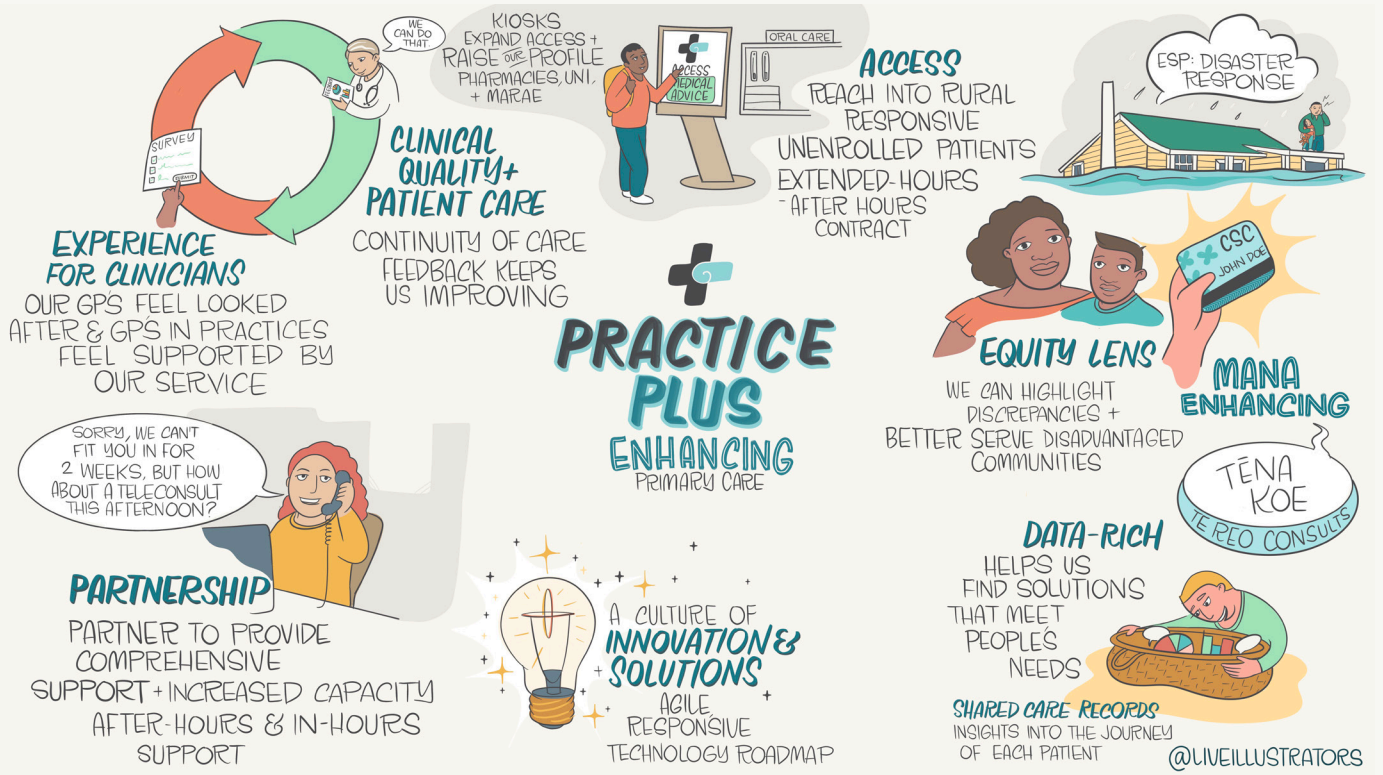


Year Two Reflections

Partnership, Equity,
and Continuity





Western Bay of Plenty
Primary Health Organisation

TŌNGIA TE URURUA KIA TUPU
WHAKARITORITO TE TUPU
O TE HARAKEKE



Practice Plus has been developed between Tū Ora Compass, Pinnacle Health, THINK Hauora, Pegasus Health and Te Awakairangi Health Network to increase access options for primary care. We have developed a telehealth service in partnership with our clinician network to secure continuity of care between a virtual clinical service and a patient's regular clinical team.

@LIVEILLUSTRATORS

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A Word from the Practice Plus Chair

*Ka mahi tahi tatou,
ka taea e tatou te whakatutuki
i tetahi mea*

When we work together, we can
achieve anything

Practice Plus was launched in response to several challenges seen by our practices including workforce shortages and the sustainable delivery of afterhours care. Led by Tū Ora Compass Health and Pinnacle Health Network, Practice Plus was established in partnership with Think Hauora and Te Awakairangi Health Network. We have welcomed Pegasus Health and Western Bay of Plenty PHOs to the partnerships and also provide the service to six other PHOs.

The service works alongside general practice, as a trusted partner in care by offering additional capacity and improving access to afterhours primary healthcare services. With over 300 general practices signed up with Practice Plus as their partner covering almost half the total population of Aotearoa, I believe we are achieving that mission and vision successfully.

Primary health and telehealth continue to evolve and Practice Plus is continuing to adapt and diversify to support general practice and communities across the motu. As we enter our third year of operation, I am excited by the opportunities that the new rural telehealth service, 'Ka Ora', brings. Practice Plus is a partner in Ka Ora and it is



Justine Thorpe

great to have a sustainable and accessible rural telehealth service now in place. We do however need to ensure we can maintain access for CSC holders and U14 in urban areas of Aotearoa through dedicated funding and will continue discussions on this with funders. I also look forward to seeing the growth of dedicated virtual pods, our dedicated locum service and supporting the unenrolled population, an initiative close to my heart as it has made a big difference in Wairarapa in the community where I live.

Telehealth continues to demonstrate its value and importance as an additional resource to the general practice team. The Practice Plus Team is committed to the partnership with general practice and works hard to ensure that continuity of care and communication with a person's general practice are a priority.

I look forward to seeing the growth of Practice Plus.

PARTNERSHIP

EQUITY

CONTINUITY



Introduction

Practice Plus emphasises its values of **Partnership, Equity, and Continuity of Care.**

Practice Plus is a virtual telehealth solution founded at the beginning of 2022 by PHOs in New Zealand, Tū Ora Compass Health and Pinnacle Health. At the end of our second year, our service partners now include the following PHOs; Auckland PHO, East Health PHO, Health Hawkes Bay PHO, Marlborough PHO, Te Awakairangi Health Network, THINK Hauora, Western Bay of Plenty PHO and Whanganui Health. This equates to population coverage of over 2.1 million enrolled patients.

The service supports practices with additional virtual capacity (via both telephone and video modalities) during business hours for surge capacity but predominantly after hours, over weekends, and public holidays when practices are closed, allowing their patients to access an online telehealth appointment with either a GP or fully scoped primary care Nurse Practitioner.

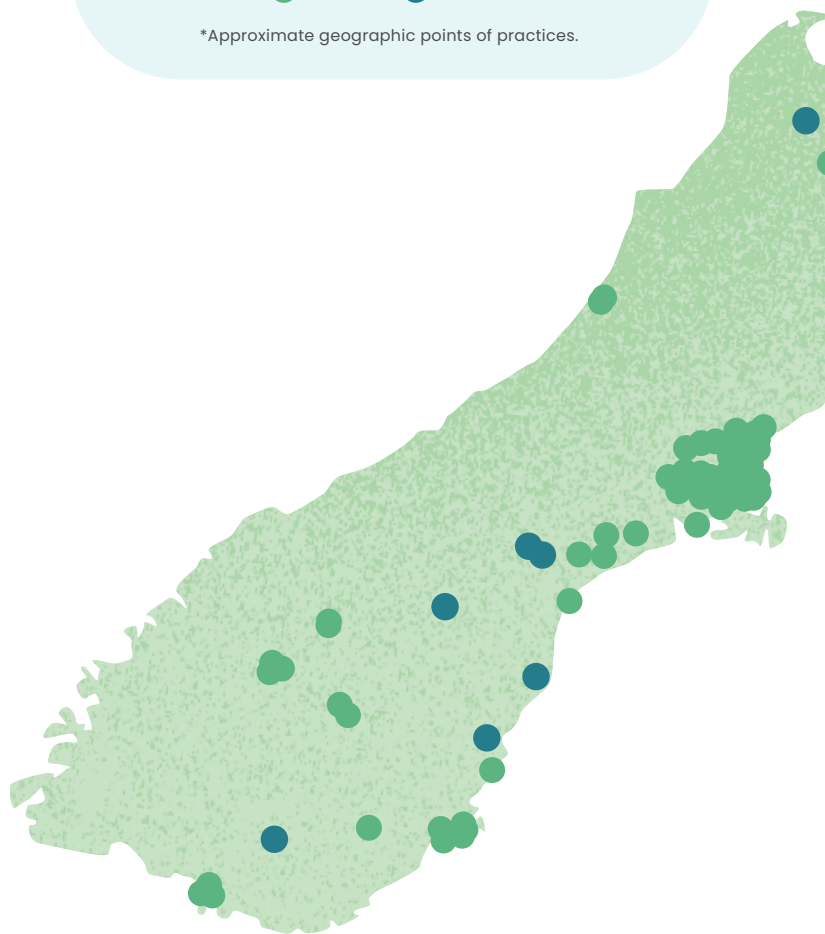
Practice Plus is placed as an extension to general practice, to complement and collaborate rather than compete. If practices lack capacity, they have a trusted partner to refer their patients to. The service has also grown to offer a dedicated locum service during business hours for general practices providing exclusive access to sessions with a Practice Plus clinician. This service includes an appointment book designated for only their patients, as well as inbox management support as value-add services, again to support general practice capacity at times when they need it most.

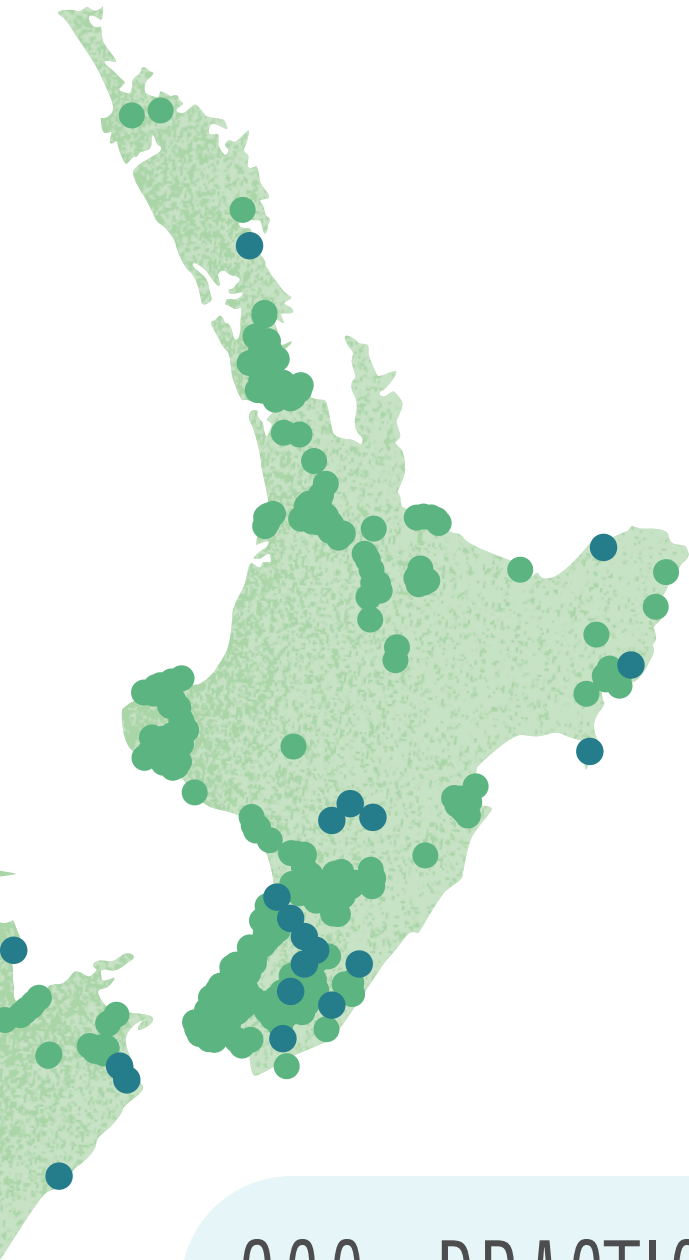
Practice Plus does not enrol patients or claw back from general practices when we consult with one of their patients. Practice Plus ensures the continuity of care remains with the patient's enrolled provider.

PRACTICES
ON BOARDED*

● 2022 ● 2023

*Approximate geographic points of practices.





Since its inception the service has gone from strength to strength, with PHOs and practice numbers increasing each month, our clients entrusting Practice Plus to look after their patients when they aren't available. Practice Plus is also supporting the unenrolled population with dedicated clinics as they face challenges with practices unable to take new enrolments.

Clinicians working for Practice Plus can access a health overview of patient's clinical data across most of the motu and can provide services as a GP in a clinic setting including requesting investigations, completing referrals and sending secure prescriptions via NZePs to a patient's nearest pharmacy.

Practice Plus now supports an enrolled population of over two million patients. Patients have been assessed by telehealth modalities such as telephone or video consultation from their homes, care facilities, pharmacies, and community outreach events all across the motu. Thanks to Practice Plus, patients from Invercargill to Kaitaia can now access a same-day appointment with a trusted provider.

Practice Plus has also been able to expand into providing a locum service to practices that are short-staffed. This means patients can go to their GP and see one of our clinicians via telehealth in a private room, or have their appointment online. As our clinicians are located across the motu, we have more options for staff online to support those in any location. A further initiative is our response to increased administration demands for GP's in practices. We have been able to provide inbox management, reducing administration time for many GP's which frees up time for them to see more of their patients during the day and also reduces overtime and work fatigue.

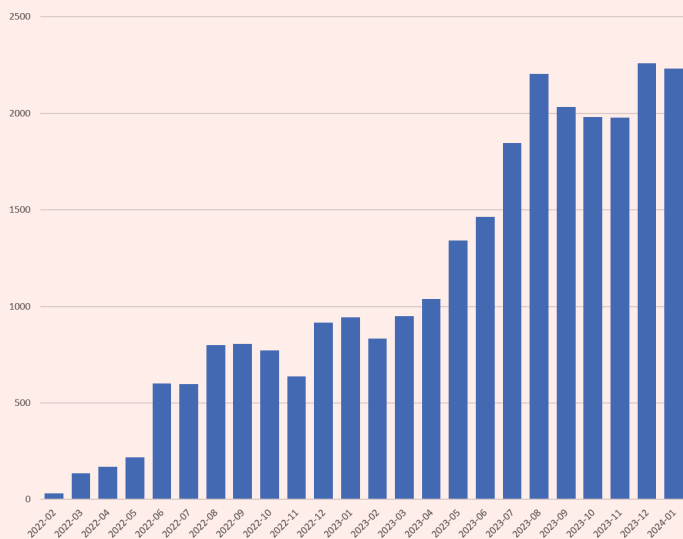
260+ PRACTICES

Involvement with Practice Plus

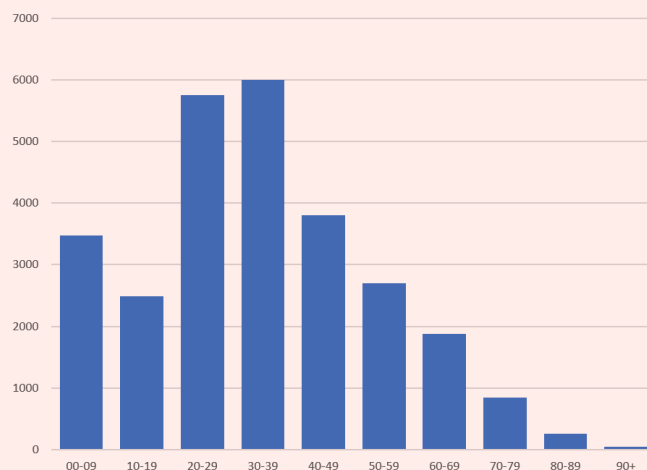
SERVICE PARTNERS

Auckland PHO, East Health PHO, Health Hawke's Bay PHO, Marlborough PHO, Te Awakairangi Health Network, THINK Hauora, Western Bay Of Plenty PHO and Whanganui Health

Overview of Year 2



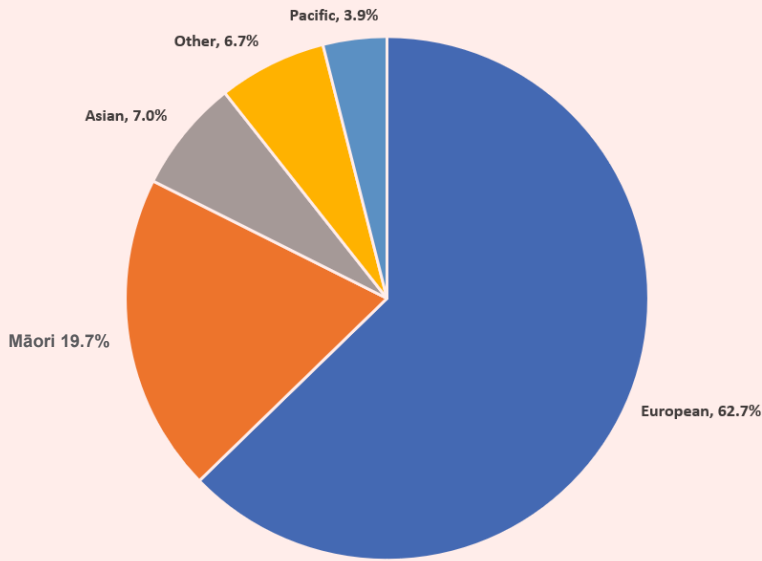
Appointments by Month



Appointments by Age

Partnership

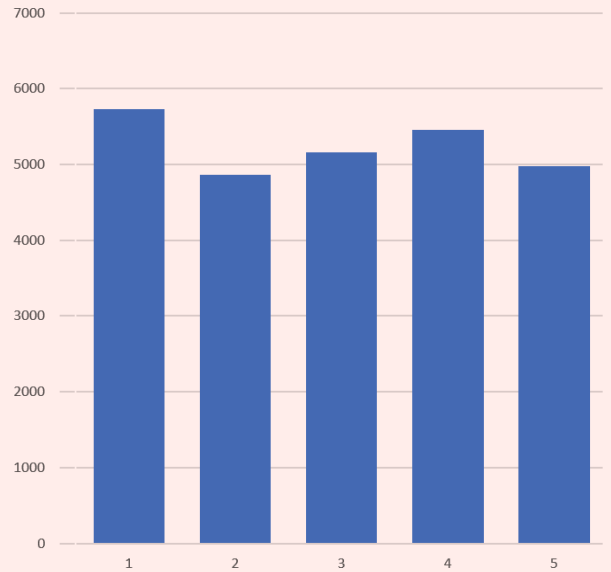
- Practice Plus is partnered with 12 PHOs (6x Limited Partners and 6x PHO customers), including 260 practices.
- Patients completed consultations from 888 nationwide GP practices.
- Practice Plus has provided 2,200 hours of Locum/Inbox support since September 2023.
- 20% of patients used vouchers to partially or fully fund their consultation.
- 10% of consulted patients were not enrolled with a GP and were offered enrolment support.
- 27,240 patients were seen in the Practice Plus open appointment service. This number does not include additional patients consulted via the Practice Plus virtual practice locum service.
- During the holiday season in December and January, the service consulted with an average of 2,250 patients per month.
- 50% of patients were directed to use our service by their enrolled practice.



4.79 Star Average Feedback

*Practice Plus Post-Consult Reviews

Patient Ethnic Group & Feedback



Quintile Count

- The ethnicity breakdown of patients shows that 20% are Māori, showing a higher uptake of Māori than the overall population breakdown, which is a great success.
- The uptake of Pasifika is 3.9% and work is underway to identify the barriers to accessing the service
- 25% are CSC holders and this is predominantly due to honouring the CSC rate of \$19.50.
- Quintile 4 and 5 patients combined are the highest cohort of patients at 40%.
- Over 1,200 patients aged 70 plus years have accessed the service.
- The satisfaction rate from over 4,000 patients who completed the feedback, sits at an average of 4.8 out of 5.

Meet our Team

Leadership



General Manager
Jess White

I am proud to present our reflections document looking back on the successes, growth, and developments we have made at Practice Plus and observing how this reflects in our communities who are enabled to access primary care promptly.

I am very excited to lead Practice Plus into its third year of operations as we go from strength to strength, continuing to diversify our services to practices and support our communities.



Clinical Director
Dr Emma Calvert

Emma is a GP based in Wellington who holds the role of Clinical Director for both Practice Plus and Ka Ora Telecare. Emma also works for Tū Ora Compass Health PHO with an array of clinical advisory roles.

I look forward to continuing to improve our clinical quality through our telehealth service over the coming year to ensure we maintain a high-quality service.

We continue to see a 90% resolution rate through our telehealth appointments and maintain an exceptionally high average customer satisfaction rating of 4.8 / 5 stars. I'm proud of all the team at Practice Plus who have contributed to our success.



Operations Lead
Tristan Santer

The second year saw Practice Plus begin to think outside the box in how we operate and integrate with our practices. I come to work every day knowing we are going to help practices in need and provide timely access for patients.

The integration with the Manage My Health patient portal is going to change the way patients can access Practice Plus. We have been working on this since service inception and it is finally coming to fruition. More details to follow this year so watch this space!



Workforce and Practice Liaison
Sarah Dunn

I am thrilled to have joined the team this year. My highlight for Practice Plus was achieving our busiest month over the festive period, where in three weeks the service provided 1,500 patient consultations. It's a testament to the hard work of our Practice Plus team and our dedicated team of clinicians.

Over the next year, I would love to see more pods installed and our booking on behalf functionality, which allows patients provided with assistance to access Practice Plus at their usual healthcare provider. Although in its early stages, it's proving to be successful in breaking down the access barrier and we look forward to rolling out more of these over the coming year.

Clinical Team

Our clinical team reside all across Aotearoa and consist of General Practitioners, Urgent Care Specialists and fully scoped Nurse Practitioners. Most clinicians employed by Practice Plus supplement their in-person clinic hours. Some of our clinicians have semi-retired from their clinic work as they have given a lot to their face-to-face community over the years. We also have clinicians on maternity leave who can work for Practice Plus from the comfort of their own homes.

Remote work also means that our clinicians can be working anywhere in the world, as long as they are registered and have a practising certificate for New Zealand. We have some New Zealand clinicians working for us who are currently living in Australia, and in the past have had clinicians who have spent time holidaying in Canada and the United States

but have continued to offer their services with Practice Plus. We have a strong recruitment pipeline due to our high-quality model of care and core values of partnering with practices.

We have a robust onboarding process, training, and orientation, as well as regular peer support, audits and reviews of clinical practice and guidelines. Practice Plus is supported by a comprehensive administration and IT support team that covers operational hours for patients, practices and pharmacies.

When surveying our clinicians, they rated our support team 5 out of 5. We are proud to have a responsive and highly skilled support team wrapping around the clinicians.

READ CLINICIAN STORIES

on page 24



Clinical Governance

The Practice Plus Clinical Governance Framework holds Practice Plus accountable for continually reviewing and improving the quality of services it provides. It also safeguards the expected high standards of care by creating an environment where clinical staff can upskill, train and maintain the high level of care and consumer experience that patients expect when they access the service.

To ensure it adheres to the high standards expected of Practice Plus clinicians, the team engage regularly with stakeholders for feedback on clinical governance activities and actively receives, monitors and reviews patient feedback. Feedback and lessons from this assist our ongoing improvements to policies and procedures. Clinicians also engage regularly in open discussions regarding clinical governance with the opportunity to input into the process, including non-clinical staff, and ensure clinicians are up to date with best practices and resources available to them, including formularies, protocols and pathways.

Practice Plus also works hard to promote equity in its services, especially for groups that regularly hit barriers when attempting to access healthcare services. Participants from these known groups including but not limited to Māori and Pasifika are actively encouraged to participate and input into clinical governance activities to ensure an equity lens is applied to all Practice Plus policies, procedures and activities.



Clinical Quality

Clinicians undergo comprehensive training and onboarding when joining Practice Plus, facilitated by the management team, covering various aspects of service provision. This training includes understanding the scope of our services, regional differences in clinical care, Health Pathways, and guidelines for referrals and investigations. Additionally, clinicians are trained in accessing and reviewing patient information from data repositories to inform their decision-making process.

Practice Plus maintains a set of standardised Clinical Policies to ensure consistency in the quality of care delivered across the service. Clinicians are subject to regular audits when they start and during their service with Practice Plus to monitor compliance with best

practices and guidelines, as well as areas for improvement in technical and clinical aspects of consultations. A monthly peer group platform also connects clinicians across the country designed to discuss clinical presentations in-depth and encourage reflection on their practices.

Data is regularly reviewed by the team to ensure service performance matches the expected Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as well as audits to review controlled drug prescribing and antibiotic usage. These audits are shared openly with clinicians and discussion is encouraged. A data-driven approach ensures development and improvement focuses are in the right area to improve the service. Any identified concerns, especially of a clinical nature are dealt with promptly and openly with the clinician involved with the Clinical Director to ensure they are resolved promptly.





Dedicated Virtual Service

A new option for PHOs enrolled with Practice Plus is a dedicated virtual service. This service allows a PHO to invest upfront in a dedicated number of appointments that are reserved for a specific urgent care centre, geographic region, or a particular cohort of patients. This will ensure that appointments are available to these specific target groups as a priority, with members of the public unable to book them.

The booking system requires the patient to insert their information that will indicate if they are eligible for the appointments such as their usual practice/urgent care centre, or their details, to ensure these dedicated appointments are utilised by the priority groups identified.

MidCentral utilised this service by ensuring those enrolled in a THINK Hauora practice could access dedicated appointments between 4pm to 6pm each weekday, in response to capacity issues and as part of their winter planning. This clinic then down scaled in the summer season.

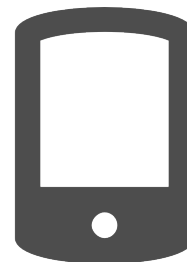
“THINK Hauora see telehealth as a critical tool in being able to manage our patients in providing the right care, by the right person, at the right time.

INTRODUCED VOUCHER SYSTEM

During mid-2022

1,125 PATIENTS ACCESSED CARE

via Vouchers from 1 July 2023 to 1 February 2024



After introducing the voucher scheme in Mid-2022, we increased the voucher scheme – through both funding and promotion of the service – where we gave vouchers to all general practice teams, Māori/Iwi providers, some pharmacies, St Johns, Urgent Care Centres, Healthy Homes team, social service providers, and ED.

Between 1 July 2023 to 1 February 2024, Practice Plus consulted 3,128 patients. Of those, 2,003 paid for the service, with 1,125 accessing it using a voucher” – Ashleigh Blackbourne and Dr Paul Cooper, THINK Hauora PHO.”

Western Bay of Plenty also utilised this service for those in their region under the age of 14. This was dedicated to support afterhours care due to under 14’s being high users of afterhours clinics, giving whānau another option for care when their usual practice was closed.

“Practice Plus is the sole virtual provider endorsed by the WBOP PHO and included in arrangements to offer free after-hours access to children under the age of 14 years. This initiative has proven to be a highly impactful and thoughtful approach to increase the healthcare options for children” – Phil Back, General Manager of Network Services Western Bay of Plenty PHO



Inbox Management and Repeat Script Support

This service provides a Practice Plus Locum GP to provide inbox management and repeat script support, reducing the administration of GP working practices. The service allows the locum to connect remotely to the Practice Management System to manage and action inbox tasks. This service can be tailored uniquely to each practice depending on their requirements, including which inboxes are monitored, and which tasks the locum needs to action such as information requests or clinic letters for a set amount per day over a set duration.

Practices have been utilising the service to reduce the administration for their clinicians, allowing them to see more patients during the day and help achieve a better work-life balance for those having to do the administration in the evening.

"Queen Street Medical has used the inbox support three times now and it has been incredibly helpful. The doctor came back from his 10-day leave and said this was life-changing for him. It meant when he came back from leave his inbox was empty and he could start his new week fresh. It also meant we didn't have to block out other Doctors' valuable appointment time to manage their colleague's inbox."

Janine Simm – Queen Street Medical Practice Manager

"I found the process, communication and support from Practice Plus really good. It was easy to arrange the inbox support at short notice, the process was clear and any queries I had were answered promptly."

"From a clinical perspective there were a few teething issues with our processes. This was the first time we've had virtual locum support. Once we changed the process of who to forward specific results to and the clear annotation of the result and what's needed, this was much easier to manage. 'Dr. X' was flexible and easy to work with throughout the whole time, He had great comms and had no problem adjusting to the new processes as we figured out how it would work best."

Erin Millar – Porirua Union & Community Health Service Practice Manager



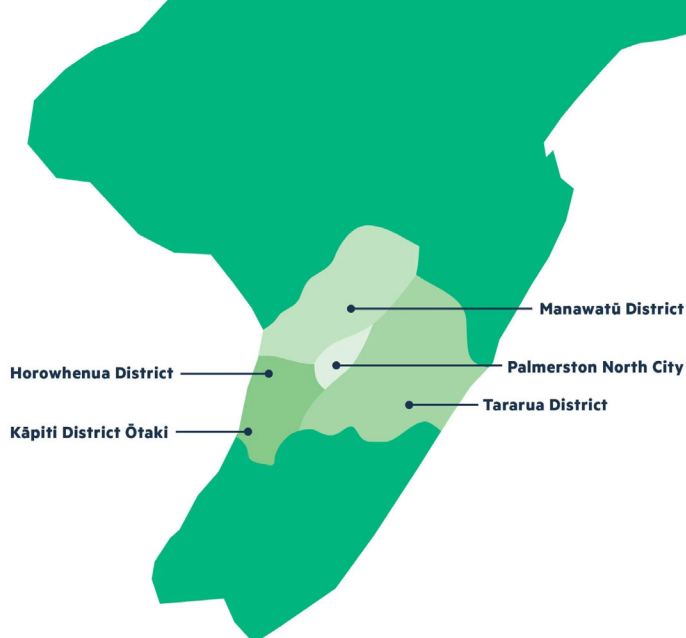
Kiosks and Dedicated Pods

To reduce demand at urgent care centres, Practice Plus has begun installing Practice Plus kiosks with tablet computers in selected urgent care centres that experience high numbers of patients where the medical care can be dealt with via a telehealth consultation.

Patients are triaged by the team onsite, those who may experience a relatively long wait or assessed as being potentially resolved by telehealth are guided to the kiosk and assisted to book an appointment online. The patient is then able to return home and complete their appointment in the comfort of their home. This service is available during regular business hours, as well as after hours.

THINK Hauora

PHO services GP Practices across the MidCentral Region, including Ōtaki, Horowhenua, Manawatū, Palmerston North and Tararua. The PHO has an enrolled population of over 170,000, with 19 practices onboarded into Practice Plus.



Originally onboarded in early 2022, THINK Hauora has utilised Practice Plus to support with capacity not just within their GP network, but also the wider healthcare network in MidCentral. They introduced a voucher scheme in July 2022 to improve access to healthcare for some priority populations, particularly in rural practices, Māori/Iwi providers and some pharmacies.

The team caught up with Ashleigh Blackburn, Clinical Lead for Acute Care, and Dr Paul Cooper, Medical Advisor – Acute Care and System Integration, to talk about how Practice Plus has been able to support them.

THINK Hauora see telehealth as a critical tool in being able to manage our patients in providing the right care, with the right person, at the right time.

Telehealth is an important part of our approach to providing services to the MidCentral population. For THINK Hauora, telehealth is a key element of our acute care strategy which involves five main streams – telehealth, POAC services, after-hours services and management of acute demand, secondary care integration, and the communication of these.

In the MidCentral district, our GP-to-patient ratio is the lowest in the country which is why telehealth is such a key component to ensuring access to care. The decision for THINK Hauora to partner with Practice Plus was a concerted effort to increase the use of telehealth and this provided extra consulting capacity for many of our general practice teams who are workforce-constrained. This scheme has been able to improve access to health care for many patients and is a real benefit to our region.

After initially introducing a small voucher scheme in winter 2022, we decided to do replicate this campaign on a much larger scale for the winter of 2023 both through funding, distribution, and promotion of the service. We gave vouchers and codes to all general practice teams, Māori/Iwi providers, some pharmacies, St Johns, Whakarongorau afterhours telehealth service, urgent care centres, Healthy Homes team, social service providers, and the Palmerston North ED. These vouchers and codes provided a free consult for the patient if they meet one of the criteria. The criteria to be eligible for a voucher or code is patients must be Māori/Pasifika, CSC holders, under 14's, and anyone whom the provider deemed the cost would be a barrier to the patient accessing acute health care services.

The Practice Plus team has been fantastic to work with. The onboarding process was smooth, particularly as we were one of the first to begin. The communication from the team was consistently to be timely, and easy to understand. From a data provision perspective, they were great too. Practice Plus were able to connect with and work alongside our Data and Digital team and were able to provide practical resources for us as the PHO and relevant resources that are easy to follow for our general practice teams too.

The Practice Plus team were also able to customise their service to work with local situations and local demands, which has been greatly beneficial for us.

We also appreciated that Emma Calvert (Clinical Director) provided a presentation to Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora staff which was well-received and helpful in highlighting a system-wide approach to the management of acute demand.

The feedback from our patients is that generally, they love it! Practices who have picked it up, think it's great and have been able to work directly with our team to customise anything that's been needed. They love it because it provides extra capacity, continuity of care is upheld, and the GPs of Practice Plus close the loop with the patient's usual GP team. Essentially, Practice Plus is seen as an extension of the GP team by providing extra consulting capacity where there is no availability in the host practice.

Between 1 July 2023 to 1 February 2024, Practice Plus consulted with 3,128 patients. Of them, 2,003 paid for the service, with 1,125 accessing it using a voucher. Just over 400 of these were over the Christmas and New Year period.



A Virtual Corridor in Pharmacy – Queen Street Pharmacy¹

In 2023, a virtual corridor was introduced in the pharmacy, allowing people to book and attend Practice Plus appointments at Queen Street Pharmacy. The team caught up with Pharmacy owner Brooke McKay to talk and reflect on how effective the corridor has been.

We started getting busier on weekends and late at night and patients presenting had much more complex health conditions and needs compared to the patients we used to see. We were starting to feel like we were letting the community down and we were referring patients to after-hour clinics when these weren't medical emergencies - they were acute care needs. We felt a lot of these could be better managed locally and safely within a nurse/pharmacist and virtual doctor scope. Many of our afterhours presentations were from families with young kids. We know waiting times across the country are long, which isn't ideal, especially for young families. The idea of Practice Plus meant we could book an appointment for the patient. It was much more convenient for them and being able to offer our patients a wrap around triage and treat service has a much more desirable outcome.

Practice Plus is an easy addition to any front-line service. It plays a vital role in managing acute care needs and for some is a preferred method of treatment. Heading into winter we need to think about our vulnerable and high-needs whānau and how we can facilitate the safest option for our patients. Being able to treat these acute conditions in pharmacy with Practice Plus and our team will help reduce presentations to Emergency Departments and After Hours clinics, both of which are already stretched and will become extremely busy over winter.



Once people used the service they were very happy, especially with the convenience and care provided. After-hours appointments for tamariki have been and continue to be a big success and having the staff onsite to assist with weight checks, blood pressure and hands-on triage helps increase what we can triage and treat. We use voucher codes, credit cards and a new booking facility which makes scheduling appointments so much easier, and the high level of customer satisfaction is awesome to see.

Our Pharmacy staff love feeling like they can help and make a difference. The system is under so much pressure that everything we do to help reduce the load and facilitate early intervention is worth it.

The Practice Plus team are amazing! We have never met in person but feel they are now part of our wider pharmacy whānau. They are fast to respond and help with our expanding needs. The interactions with the virtual clinicians have also been enjoyed by the team. We find the clinicians very accommodating and respond well to our integrated set-up and collaborative approach. We are also learning a lot during this process as well, and are excited to see how this model continues to grow into the future.

1. Queen Street Pharmacy in Hutt Valley is a 9am-9pm, 7-day-a-week community pharmacy. They offer a wide range of services and are co-located with a physio and GP. They have two nurses on staff and 24 employees on their pharmacy team offering ear wax suctioning, nurse and after-hours triage, suturing, vaccinations, wart removal, and an array of other pharmacy services.

Supporting the Unenrolled Population

Case Study – Wairarapa

Practice Plus has been agile as a solution for several districts with unique challenges when it comes to accessing primary health. In Wairarapa, workforce shortage saw many practices close their books to new patients, resulting in a high number of unenrolled patients.

The Wairarapa region has a growing number of unenrolled members of the community, currently estimated at 2,500-3,000 people.

To improve access to healthcare at a time when Primary Care is at full capacity, Practice Plus has proposed an interim general practice telehealth consultation option, in partnership with Tū Ora Compass Wairarapa, Te Whatu Ora – Wairarapa and Masterton Medical.

While patients are waiting for enrolment, they can have a consult with a Practice Plus dedicated clinician, with a specific workflow and funded rates for this service by Te Whatu Ora for a 30-minute appointment due to their delayed care requirements. Some of these are completed by a telehealth assisted appointment alongside a Health Care Assistant or Kaiāwhina.

These patients can either complete their telehealth consultation at home, or assisted at Masterton Medical – the consultations can be either be over Video, or Phone, dependent on patient preference.

Practice Plus will not enrol these patients but will provide interim care to ease the pressure until practices are able to reopen their books.

In a 12 month period over 1,500 un-enrolled patients were seen in the service (some of these being international patients), with 30% of these patients re-presenting to Practice Plus more than once.

Practice Plus can help to facilitate enrolment support

When a patient has no enrolled practice, the Clinician who assesses the patient will always ask the patient why they are not enrolled with a GP. If the patient does not have a clear plan for future enrolment, the Clinician will ask for consent to facilitate enrolment. The Practice Plus support team will then review the patients address and find the most appropriate local practice that could enrol the patient. Practice Plus has relationships with PHOs and particular practices with open enrolment and will ask if this patient can be referred.



Practice Plus Celebrates its Busiest Period

As 2023 ended, there was a general feel from general practice across the motu about the need for a break over the festive period into the new year. With more practices and PHOs onboarded with Practice Plus, the team was preparing for a busy festive period. Practice Plus appointments were available every day throughout the festive period, until 10pm weekdays and 8am to 8pm weekends and public holidays, including Christmas Day.

From 23 December through to 7 January, Practice Plus consulted over 1,500 patients who needed to speak to a GP, a record number of consults. The busiest day was 29 December when the 11 Clinicians rostered on consulted 120 patients throughout the day. Ninety percent of appointments were resolved by the telehealth appointment and we maintained a 4.7/5 star patient experience rating, with much of the feedback relating to how easy the service was to use and the relief to get an appointment quickly.

Clinical Director for Practice Plus Dr Emma Calvert said the opportunity for Practice Plus to support our partner practices across the motu allowed some of our primary care workforce to take a well-earned break over the festive season.

“It’s been a long and busy few years with the pandemic, workforce shortages and reduced capacity for primary care to support the health sector. Many general practices entrust Practice Plus as their partner to provide care for their patients whilst they were closed, and this was evident in our busiest month to date seeing over 1,500 patients”, Dr Calvert said.

“I’m proud of the hard work of our clinicians over the festive period, and our teams that supported in the background, especially the booking centre staff at Tū Ora who supported with patient enquiries throughout the festive period. We will continue to improve and expand our service to support our communities well into the future and I’m excited to see this grow” Jess White, General Manager added.



Meet our Clinicians



Practice Plus, Hutt Valley
Dr Dan Talbot

My name is Dan Talbot and I am a UK-trained GP having moved to New Zealand in June 2021. I initially started working as a salaried GP in the Hutt Valley and after 2 years combined this with working for Practice Plus in June 2023.

I opted to work for Practice Plus as it gave me more autonomy. As a salaried GP working for a corporate-owned practice, it meant that I had some say in how the practice operated but ultimately decisions were made from higher up. Practice Plus is quite a set structure with a more predictable workload so makes it a bit less daunting before going to work each day. I am working more independently so most things are just my responsibility.

Since joining Practice Plus, it has given me more freedom in my work schedule and allowed for many more evening and weekend shifts than I would have otherwise 'had to do', but on a diary that I have more control over.

I worked as a salaried GP in the NHS, and when COVID-19 hit had to adapt quite quickly to telehealth and new ways of working – however, the practice I was at already structured their day with on-the-day triage so I had some good experience.

My feeling is that there is absolutely a role for telehealth if used appropriately. With the current climate of primary care, solely in-person appointments is unsustainable and not always the best solution.

Long-term care of a specific patient group is also difficult for several reasons: GPs move around more; more allied health professionals are involved in patient pathways and there just aren't enough specialist GPs for the population. Increased administrative and paperwork burdens, shifting of secondary care services to GPs and increasing complexity of medical conditions have made the job harder than ever.

I think with how much GPs have to manage on a day-to-day basis once they have finished the responsibility of patient care should shift to an alternative service

afterhours (so they can have a rest/downtime). I don't think the responsibility for a patient's care 24/7 should be down to one named individual and it should be the wider health system that manages this. My experience of this since moving to NZ is that services are fragmented, and every different area has a different approach and opinions.

Practice Plus provides an important role in some of these afterhours provisions where local providers cannot deal with volume or a problem can be safely and more easily solved over telehealth. Face-to-face care is important and all these services should work to complement each other, not in competition.

Being able to manage a problem over telehealth that has saved a patient a 4-hour round trip (without wait times) is I think, quite impressive especially the resolution rate of Practice Plus and patient satisfaction

There are several reasons I like working for Practice Plus. The team is very supportive. I feel there is a constant internal review of how we can do things better. It genuinely feels like we are trying to help day-to-day general practice (most of us have all done this before or are currently) and not overburden them with extra work or worry. I think there is still potential development in the future – the Ill service (over the phone advice) is in the UK which I have also worked for, is in some ways not dissimilar. Call a handler, phone triage of a problem, direct to appropriate service. Deal with over the phone/ video or bring in for face-to-face. The provision of care is so disjointed nationally and locally however I think it will take many years before all gets tidied up.

I also do Ka Ora shifts and locum shifts for different practices through Practice Plus which facilitates and takes some of the administrative burden off my arranging. It gives a real variety to my working week and keeps me from burning out. It's also really eye-opening to work for practices throughout the country to see how differently things are run, how things can be done better, how can I improve my own approach etc.



Practice Plus, Christchurch
Dr Katie Sleeman

I'm Katie, I work as a GP in Christchurch, Practice Plus and also do some urgent care on the weekends. This year I am branching out a little and starting some cosmetic medicine training which is exciting. I graduated in 2014 from the University of Otago, but before this I qualified as a beauty therapist, working on cruise ships in the Bahamas and spending my twenties looking after clients' skin. I loved skin so much, it inspired me to do medicine. Here I am nearly 20 years down the track enjoying life as a GP, telehealth, and dabbling in cosmetic medicine.

I've been with Practice Plus for eight months. I have two young girls at home, and although I found that being a GP was great, I needed more work-life balance. That's how I came across Practice Plus. It gives me the flexibility to work from home whilst still seeing patients and making a difference. I save about an hour and a half on just getting ready and driving to work, time that I can spend with my family and our new puppy Huey (he's a Groodle, a Golden Retriever cross Poodle).

Five months before the pandemic, we had our youngest child Cleo - I call her a pandemic baby. I went back to work just as the pandemic was hitting and New Zealand had closed its doors. It was surreal, driving down the main street in Christchurch and no one was around. It had a deathly quietness to it, and I just wanted to be home with my babies. I think this was the start of my interest in Telehealth.

I worked as a GP for a few years and because of ongoing sickness and viruses with my kids, along with the post-lockdown effects on the healthcare system, I was finding life in general practice tough (and I know I wasn't the only medical professional feeling this way!). This is when I became interested in Practice Plus - it gave me the flexibility to work from home while continuing to practice and work as a GP. I could also experience a variety of patients and cultures over video. It's pretty awesome and there is a need for this nationwide. My template is usually booked for the day, but it's a friendly template and I get a break to get a cup of tea or put that pile of laundry on.

I think as a GP, phone and video consults have their place now, offering a great service for those in need and to be honest, there's not much we can't do over a video consult these days and it's almost like we are in-person. I also do some locuming for a rural practice up North. Some of these patients can't get in to see their GP for 4 weeks and they are extremely grateful for this service.

Practice Plus has been great for me and our family. I enjoy working for Practice Plus and I feel very supported. Thanks, Tristran for your IT help, he's always there when something is needed 😊

Practice Plus Advisory Committee

Practice Plus has a full advisory committee consisting of practice managers, practice nurses and GPs who work closely with the Practice Plus leadership team. Working collaboratively ensures an effective partnership between Practice Plus and the practices it supports, making sure that Practice Plus receives regular feedback from a general practice perspective to ensure it meets requirements. It ensures general practice remains a key stakeholder, maintaining that partnership view and can feedback from the perspective of their patients.

Nicky Hart – Feilding Health Care (Committee Chair) Chief Executive Officer of Feilding Health Care Group

“Practice Plus was a fantastic service for patients enrolled with their Feilding, Ashhurst and Palmerston North Practices.”

“It’s really important that people can access care over the holiday period when practice hours can change from the norm. Practice Plus offered a very convenient and accessible alternative when people needed to see a doctor during the festive period, outside of practice opening hours. We look forward to working with the great team at Practice Plus in the future, providing care for our patients.”

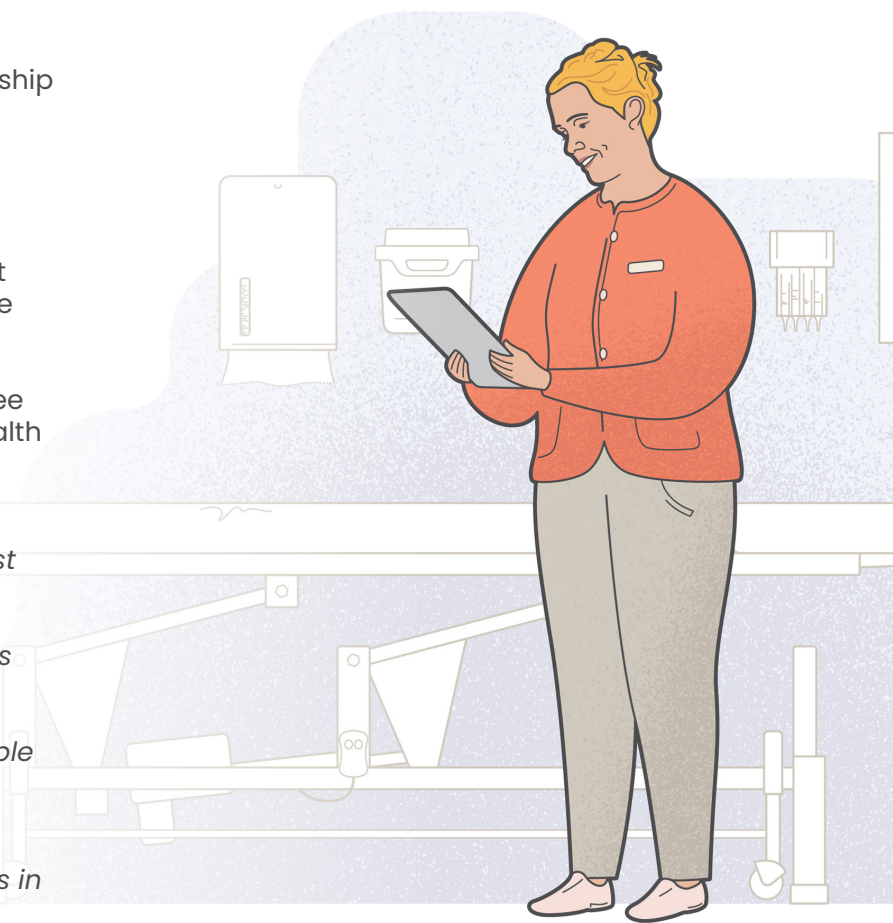
Rachel Fitzgerald – Silverstream Medical Centre

“It’s been an absolute game-changer to be able to offer this service as an option for patients, especially during staff sickness.”

“I have a lot of confidence in Practice Plus due to the clinical governance and great support from the leadership team. It’s been a very good experience.”

Also on our advisory committee are;

Dr Dale Towers – Taupō Medical Centre
Dr Kirsty Lennon – Raumati Road Surgery
Michelle Curel – Newtown Medical Centre
Lisa Hamblin – 3 Rivers Medical Centre, Greytown
Andrea Hedges – Papamoa Beach Family Practice



Practice Plus offered a very convenient and accessible alternative when people needed to see a doctor during the festive period, outside of practice opening hours.



Nicky Hart – Feilding Health Care (Committee Chair)
Chief Executive Officer of Feilding Health Care Group

“We always receive positive feedback from our patients saying how convenient the service is.”



Ants Toumoua – Naenae Medical Centre Nurse Manager

“It’s been an absolute game-changer to be able to offer this service as an option for patients, especially during staff sickness.”



Rachel Fitzgerald – Silverstream Medical Centre

Conferences

Telehealth continues to be a topic of interest not just throughout Aotearoa, but across the globe, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic which forced many people to change the way they work and deliver services. During 2023, the team attended 5 conferences to promote, reflect and celebrate the success of Practice Plus.



World Organisation of Family Doctors (WONCA) Global Conference – Sydney

“Telehealth services emerged during the post-COVID-19 pandemic as a way to alleviate pressure on the ever-growing challenge of workforce shortages and increased workload on our primary health sector. As it’s in its infancy, usage and healthcare disparities across demographics remain poorly understood. Over the past 12 months, we assessed Practice Plus data which saw the service support 6,965 patients across the motu” said Dr Calvert.

“21% of appointments were with Māori whānau, with high uptake from Quintile 4 and 5 areas of highest deprivation. Over 90% of patient concerns were resolved via their telehealth appointment, with the remaining requiring further testing or follow-up appointments. Patient satisfaction was consistently high with an average of 4.6/5 from 878 respondents.

“These findings demonstrate the key role telehealth can play in our communities to manage a diverse range of primary care presentations, without compromising equity in healthcare provision and protecting our workforce from the challenges they face” she continued.

Health Informatics New Zealand Digital Health Week Conference – Hamilton

Since the launch of Practice Plus in early 2021, it has gone from strength to strength as it onboards more PHOs and their respective practices to give their enrolled patients another option for after-hours primary care, now covering an enrolled population of roughly 1.5 million people.

“The COVID-19 pandemic made us rethink how we engage and deliver healthcare to our communities, especially when there was a risk of being in-person. Telehealth services have proven to be very successful, with our latest statistics reading that 90% of telehealth appointment problems were resolved with their virtual appointment” Dr Calvert said.

“Practice Plus doesn’t look to take patients away from practices, but to be an extension of their service when they’re not open, especially in the evenings, weekends and public holidays. The staff shortages and other challenges have put a big strain on our primary care doctors and nurses, and we’re pleased to see a successful solution to help reduce some of that stress”.



The Launch of Ka Ora Telecare



National Rural Telehealth Service

As part of Pae Ora, the Healthy Futures Act designed to improve Health for New Zealanders through a series of priority initiatives, an opportunity arose to support rural communities with the launch of a telehealth service that would provide afterhours care to anyone living or visiting rural New Zealand. Rural practices had identified increasing constraints with workforce shortages, afterhours care for many who live great distances from an afterhours clinic or ED, including recruitment and support. Te Whatu Ora opened invitations to tender for a rural telehealth service that would be funded and run for the next three years, aimed purely at supporting rural communities.

Practice Plus joined forces with two other well-known organisations – Reach Aotearoa which offers a nurse triage and support telehealth service, and Emergency Consult, a telehealth provider specialising in emergency care with emergency nurse triage and emergency medicine clinicians at the end of the phone. Combined, they created Ka Ora who was the successful applicant for the rural telehealth contract. The service offered appointments from 5pm to 8am on weekdays, and 24 hour service on weekends and public holidays.

The diverse workforce Iles Kaiāwhina to build whakawhanaunga with patients and whānau, a nursing workforce for clinical triage, telehealth services with specialist GPs and Nurse Practitioners, with the overnight service delivery by Fellowship of Australasian College Emergency Medicine (FACEM).

“The rural health sector has told us that the combined pressure of workforce shortages and unsustainable after-hours rosters means that this service is needed to support the well-being of people living rurally”, says Abbe Anderson, National Director of Commissioning, Te Whatu Ora.

“The service will enhance the care already provided by rural health teams, working with existing health providers to offer additional capacity and continuity of care.”

“Rural communities are a priority group identified in Te Pae Tata (Interim New Zealand Health Plan) and we remain dedicated to improving their access to high-quality, timely healthcare.”

Although the service is subsidised by Te Whatu Ora, a patient co-payment will be charged for consultations with a GP. Under 14s will remain free, and those with a Community Services Card or aged 65 years plus will pay \$19.50.

Rural general practice clinics will also be able to refer whānau and communities to the service after hours when they are at capacity to ensure rural patients have an alternative option to access healthcare when they need it.

“We know that access to services after working hours can be a real challenge in rural areas and creates unnecessary delays in receiving care.



**OVER
4000**
**Patients supported
since November 2023**

This new service could also make a difference for whānau, helping them avoid a lengthy trip to the hospital in the middle of the night”, said Selah Hart, Maiaka Hapori Deputy Chief Executive Public and Population Health, Te Aka Whai Ora.

The Ka Ora network brings together three existing health organisations, Reach Aotearoa, Practice Plus and Emergency Consult under one umbrella who can deliver the service nationally to rural communities.

“We acknowledge it has been a long journey, but we are excited to have launched the rural telehealth service to support our rural practices across Aotearoa. Our team have worked hard to stand up the service in a short time frame” said General Manager Jess White.

The service received positive feedback from the public and general practices, with Gary Reed; Chief Executive Officer from Clutha Health First elaborating “A number of our patients used the Ka Ora service; and found it worked well so some positive feedback for the Ka Ora team”.

“The work doesn’t stop here. Ka Ora is available to anyone living in rural New Zealand throughout the summer and beyond. We’ve received great feedback about the service and I’m excited to see it continue to support our rural communities” says Ms White.

Dr Sarah Clarke, National Clinical Director, Primary and Community Care, Te Whatu Ora said it’s promising to see in just a matter of weeks, such good uptake of the service by those living in and visiting rural areas.

“This is another way to improve equitable access to healthcare for all, no matter where we live and what time of year it is.”

KA ORA
TELE CARE
 Healthcare from home

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