



The Royal Australasian  
College of Physicians

## Media Release

### **Improving healthcare outcomes through innovative technologies New Telehealth Support Project to encourage uptake**

Monday 6 August, 2012

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) is pleased to announce the commencement of a new support project funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) to promote telehealth in medical specialist care.

The Physicians Telehealth Support Project aims to encourage the use of telehealth to increase access to specialist medical care for more Australians, especially those living in rural and regional areas.

Telehealth involves using videoconferencing for medical consultations between health professionals and patients. While the physician is at the consultant end of the video, the patient is assisted by another healthcare professional (such as a general practitioner, nurse or Aboriginal health worker). In addition to patient consultations, telehealth can also be used for supervision and education purposes.

Telehealth is a significant tool which can improve patient healthcare outcomes through innovative technology that reduces distance, travel, time and cost barriers to healthcare.

Telehealth is also a valuable tool for the provision of healthcare services in urban areas, especially for those who find it difficult to travel, including frail and aged people living in residential aged care facilities.

RACP Occupational Medicine Fellow and telehealth expert Dr David Allen noted the significant potential of the Project.

“Telehealth and other innovative healthcare technologies have the capacity to improve healthcare access to at-risk patient groups,” Dr Allen said.

“This is very much about patient-centred care, and patient feedback from telehealth consultations is uniformly very positive.

“Patients are often extremely appreciative to not have to travel long distances to access specialists. Those living in residential aged care facilities, and patients located in rural and remote communities will particularly benefit from greater use of telehealth.

“Increased uptake of telehealth by physicians has the potential to address the progressively complex challenges the Australian health landscape faces.”

In addition to the healthcare benefits associated with telehealth, the innovative technology enables greater connectivity between healthcare professionals. This increased level of communication can result in more integrated care for patients and lower levels of professional isolation, often experienced by healthcare professionals working in rural and remote communities.

Improved patient access to specialist medical care for vulnerable patient groups is a key focus for the College, as demonstrated by the implementation of this Project.

“The College is positioned to capitalise on the expertise and practical insights of the Fellowship to deliver this important project,” Dr Allen said.

“While telehealth is not new, the technology involved has improved significantly in recent years and the Government has provided additional funding for consultations and support funding to encourage greater uptake by medical practitioners.”

The Project aims at cutting through the existing barriers to telehealth, which may include lack of knowledge, or uncertainty around the technology involved.

Successful implementation will see an increase in access to specialist medical care, and increased levels of connectivity between healthcare professionals. This information sharing is to the benefit of the patients, as well as the profession.

### **Ends**

**About The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP):** The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 13,500 physicians – often referred to as medical specialists – and 5,000 trainees, across Australia and New Zealand. The College represents more than 25 medical specialties including paediatrics & child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology and public health medicine, occupational & environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients. [www.racp.edu.au](http://www.racp.edu.au)

**About DoHA’s Telehealth Support Program:**

The Australian Government has introduced a number of measures to foster the adoption of telehealth in Australia, including Medicare rebates. The Telehealth Support program was established to fund projects to assist in the introduction of Medicare rebates now available for telehealth consultations.<sup>i</sup>

For further information, please contact:

**Kate White**  
**Senior Communications Officer**  
**The Royal Australasian College of Physicians**  
**kate.white@racp.edu.au**  
**02 9256 9674 or 0408 639 697**

---

<sup>i</sup> Department of Health and Ageing website: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/work-pr-tele>