

# DELIVERING UNIVERSAL AFTER-HOURS CARE

In the highly diverse communities of Sydney's south west, My Emergency Doctor is helping connect communities to exceptional emergency telehealth care after hours and minimise costly unnecessary presentations to the region's busy emergency departments.

South Western Sydney Primary Health Network (SWSPHN) exists to support GPs, nurses and other primary health providers to deliver the highest standard of care to the local community across its seven Local Government Areas (LGAs): Bankstown, Fairfield, Liverpool, Campbelltown,

Camden, Wollondilly and Wingecarribee. Funded by the Commonwealth Government, it works tirelessly to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the region's health services and support equitable access for every resident, whenever and wherever they need it.



## Flexing care to communities

SWSPHN faces significant challenges common to most PHN's – providing access to appropriate after hours care, alleviating pressure on GPs, and reducing the number of non-urgent cases presenting at hospital EDs and costing the health system vast sums of money each year. The organisation has employed various models across the region to support after-hours care, from GP home visits and drop-in clinics to a basic after-hours GP phone service funded across four of the seven LGAs.

Each LGA under SWSPHN is vastly different, from the extensively multicultural northern regions to the ageing and more regional populations in the south – and all experience unique

barriers to accessing healthcare after hours, such as transport, mobility or language difficulties. Patients weren't always aware of their options for help outside of their GP's usual hours.

"A lot of the time, people just go straight to emergency, or they delay care until the GP opens the next day, which can lead to adverse outcomes for patients," explains Nick McGhie, SWSPHN's Digital Health and Data Manager.

"The goal is to keep people out of hospital without impacting overall patient outcomes, and to make it free and equitable right across the region so that regardless of where they live, their age or how much money they have, everyone can access quality care when they need it."



### KEY OUTCOME:

**85%**  
of patients  
**treated  
in situ**  
after MED consults  
(June–August 2021)



### MED HAS HELPED SWSPHN HEALTH TO:



**Prevent**  
unnecessary transfers



**Grow**  
community confidence



**Realise**  
operational efficiencies



**Strengthen**  
partnerships

# Beyond the ED – treating low acuity patients after hours

Seeking a different mechanism to respond to this perennial challenge, SWSPHN turned to My Emergency Doctor (MED) for an inclusive and agile telemedicine solution to fit its diverse base. Since September 2020, anyone who lives or works in SWSPHN's seven LGAs has been able to call a region-specific phone number for a free consultation with one of MED's qualified emergency specialists – all Fellows of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (FACEMs) – after hours or on weekends.

Rather than defaulting to an ED visit, patients can consult with a MED FACEM via phone or video call and receive qualified advice on their unique situation. In most cases, concerns are resolved with

home-based treatment; where necessary, the FACEM will advise them to visit an ED within a specified period or follow up with their regular GP when they reopen. They also prepare a report for the patient's GP for continuity of care.

MED also supports after-hours care for Residential Aged Care Facilities in the region, helping keep this vulnerable cohort from EDs and supplementing its wider secondary triage services provided to NSW Department of Health. Today, more than one million Australians have video and telephone access to MED's Australian-trained FACEMs through their local PHNs, accessing fast, free and comprehensive care at home when their GP is closed.

## Rapid, cost-efficient, quality care for all

Residents across SWSPHN's region rapidly embraced the service, including among CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) communities, aided by MED's comprehensive marketing campaign.

"Some of MED's FACEMs speak different languages, and all have access to the translation and interpretation service – which is certainly advantageous for our communities in Bankstown, Fairfield and Liverpool in particular," McGhie says. "MED worked with us to tailor the marketing to the different cultural groups in our area and really grow the service right across the region."

MED fields an average of 650 calls from patients in SWSPHN's area each quarter. Of these, over 80 per cent of patients are treated by a MED FACEM in situ at home, preventing unnecessary ED presentations.

"Interestingly, there's been no reduction in consultation with our other after-hours services. So it stands to reason that we're

capturing people who wouldn't normally engage with an after-hours service provider and would be more likely to go to ED or delay care completely," says McGhie.

"Each unnecessary ED presentation can cost the health system thousands of dollars, compared to a cost-efficient telehealth consult at home. In terms of cost management for the region, it's huge."

MED has also provided a pathway for screening potentially COVID-positive patients at home, whereby they can be directed to testing facilities or EDs can be alerted in advance of their arrival should they require in-hospital care.

"The service has been really well received so far, and it's great to see it so widely utilised across the region. It has definitely exceeded internal expectations of what it could achieve and pushed the boundaries of what we can do," McGhie adds.

## MED has helped SWSPHN to:

- Provide equitable region-wide access to after-hours care
- Prevent costly and unnecessary low acuity ED admissions
- Provide continuity of care with patient's regular provider
- Alleviate pressure on workforce
- Serve the needs of diverse communities
- Avoid adverse patient outcomes
- Realise financial and operational efficiencies

PRIMARY HEALTH NETWORK

CASE STUDY  
SOUTH WESTERN  
SYDNEY



KEY OUTCOME:

96%

of patients rated the service as meeting or exceeding expectations

(June–August 2021)



“It's innovative for us to have a service that can be – and is being – equitably accessed by our entire population. We see it as an efficient use of our funding; it's fulfilling a gap and capturing people more likely to present unnecessarily to ED.”

Nick McGhie,  
Digital Health and Data Manager,  
SWSPHN

Contact us today to discuss how our services can support and enhance care for your patients.

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