

MEDIA RELEASE

Demand for telehealth mental health services continues to grow in regional and remote Australia amidst healthcare accessibility crisis

- Over half of Australians in regional and remote Australia do not see a medical specialist due to a lack of access to services
- Data by HealthBright reveals long wait times for mental health support is linked to greater symptom severity
- HealthBright is dedicated to bridging the gap between mental health services for regional and remote Australia.

EMBARGO: 30 October 2023 – In a world increasingly connected through technology, telehealth services have emerged as a lifeline for regional and remote Australians. Data reveals that compared to people living in major cities, people living in rural and remote areas have higher rates of hospitalisation, death, and injury, as well as poorer access to, and use of, health care services.

Approximately 28% of Australia's population live and work in geographically remote locations. This presents a unique challenge to ensure equal access to healthcare. According to research, Australians living in regional and remote locations have reduced access to care. In fact, there's 14 psychologists per 100K population, compared to 86 psychologists per 100K in metropolitan locations¹.

These statistics shed light on the pressing issue of healthcare accessibility in regional and remote Australia and emphasise the growing importance for tele-mental health services to bridge the gap. Meta-analytic evidence demonstrates that tele-mental health for anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and other mental health issues is as effective as face-to-face care. Despite this, a staggering 58% of Australians in regional and remote areas report that not having a specialist nearby was a barrier to seeing one, compared to only 6% in major cities².

The healthcare workforce shortage in these areas is leading to longer wait times with people stuck for a means of support. According to HealthBright, the average wait time for a psychiatrist is around six months, with one in three psychiatrists no longer taking on new patients³.

Michelle Olaithe, Clinical Director at HealthBright, Australia's largest tele-mental health company, says access to quality healthcare is a fundamental right and no one should be left behind.

“40% of HealthBright clients reside in regional and remote Australia. It’s important that everyone has access to finding help and support, despite the lack of specialists in these areas,” said Michelle.

The uptake of tele-mental health services in Australia during the height of the pandemic was at 43%⁴. Since 2022, demand has continued to increase, estimated to grow to 56% in Australia by 2024⁵.

“The telehealth revolution is not just about bridging geographic and financial divides, it’s about redefining the patient-clinician relationship beyond the confines of the traditional healthcare setting,” says HealthBright CEO, Andy Laws.

“Delivering accessible mental health support to regional and remote Australia is crucial - we know one in five Australians have been affected by mental health issues, but those numbers increase in more remote communities. For example, the rate of suicide in rural and regional areas is about 40% higher than in metropolitan areas. COVID-19 proved that isolation is a huge factor of mental ill health, and with minimum three months wait time for psychologists and six months folie psychiatrists, there had to be a new approach.”

As the demand for telehealth services continues to grow, the importance of addressing these healthcare disparities cannot be overstated. HealthBright continues to meet this demand and stands ready to serve and support regional and remote Australians in their journey towards improved mental health.

About HealthBright

HealthBright’s goal is to provide high quality, accessible, affordable mental health support to everyone who needs it through outstanding digital care. Over the past year, HealthBright’s hub of digital mental health clinics have helped over 15,000 Australians get access to quality mental health support. Brands include [someone.health](#), Australian’s largest online consumer psychology provider; [Call to Mind](#), for online psychiatry services; and [Mantle](#), a specialist telehealth service for men.

About the Research & Citations

1. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/rural-remote-australians/rural-and-remote-health>
2. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/rural-remote-australians/survey-health-care-selected-findings-rural-remote/contents/summary>
3. <https://health-bright.com.au/>
4. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7461285/>
5. <https://www.bain.com/insights/in-asia-pacific-telehealth-adoption-is-expected-to-soar-through-2024-snap-chart/>