

ANZSOG CASE PROGRAM – TEACHING NOTE

Please cite this Teaching Note as: *Padula, Marinella. (2023). Ten years of reform in 10 days: Australia's telehealth revolution. [Teaching Note] Australia and New Zealand School of Government, John L. Alford Case Library: Canberra.*

Ten years of reform in 10 days: Australia's telehealth revolution

An ANZSOG Teaching Note by Marinella Padula

This Teaching Note references and provides a guide to: Padula, Marinella. (2023). Ten years of reform in 10 days: Australia's telehealth revolution. Australia and New Zealand School of Government, John L. Alford Case Library: Canberra.

Keywords: strategic management, public value, policy development, implementation and delivery, healthcare reform, crisis management, technology, telehealth, telemedicine.

Summary

By early 2020, Australia had logged its first official case of COVID-19 and the federal Department of Health activated its pandemic response which, initially, hinged on infection control. It was especially vital to protect healthcare workers from the virus, as far as possible. At the same time, people needed continued access to regular medical care whilst minimising exposure to COVID patients. Telehealth (medical consultations conducted remotely) emerged as an obvious solution. Patients could have appointments by phone or videoconference at home for routine or minor medical matters.

Telehealth was already available via Medicare in limited circumstances. However, the Health Department, with Federal Government approval, decided to extend telehealth services to all Australians, in a staged rollout. Health officials had to devise telehealth rules, item numbers and payment processes as quickly as possible that would not compromise patient safety or billing compliance. They also had to ensure patients could access medication whilst in lockdown or isolation.

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Although plans to mainstream telehealth were not new, progress had been patchy prior to COVID-19. Doctors were notably hesitant, typically citing cost, technology, and safety concerns. Now the government, practitioners and the public had a powerful incentive to make it work. But would it? And for how long?

Learning Objectives

The journey from policy development to implementation is rarely completely linear and straightforward. This case demonstrates how the policy landscape can change rapidly, suddenly opening a window of opportunity to enact plans or advance projects previously deemed too complex, too expensive or too “political”, etc. ‘Ten years of reform in 10 days’ enables students to:

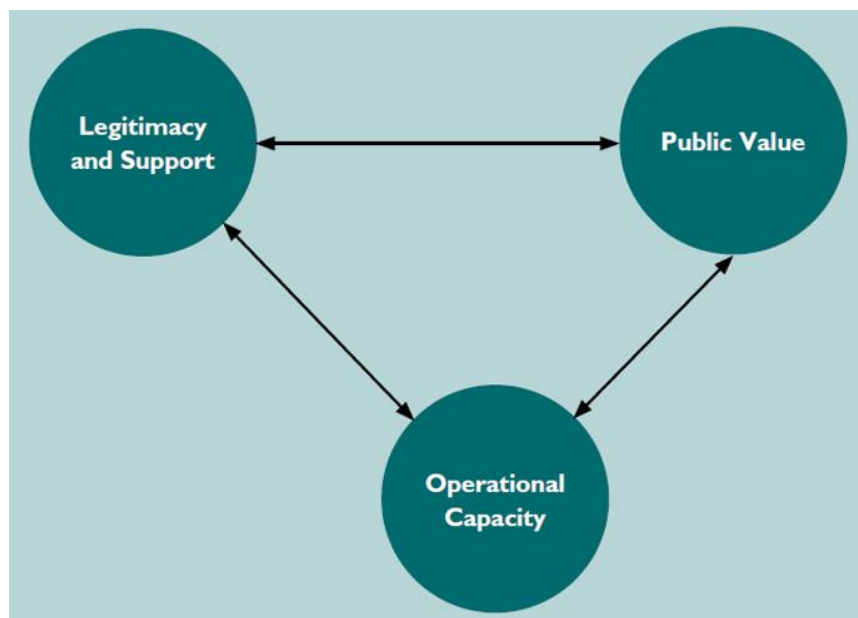
- Explore historical factors inhibiting telehealth use;
- Examine the developments/changes facilitating telehealth uptake;
- Assess the significance of COVID-19 in taking telehealth mainstream;
- Evaluate how Health Department officials worked to expand telehealth services;
- Discuss some of the risks/unintended consequences of telehealth expansion;
- Speculate how telehealth use may change in the future;
- Recommend how/if telehealth policy should change.

The case also provides a useful illustration of public management concepts such as Moore's Strategic Triangle which can be used to inform decision making and assess project feasibility (see Figure 1 below).

Suggested Teaching Approach

Developed by Harvard's Mark Moore, the Strategic Triangle provides a framework for public sector managers to better understand the key components needed, for example, to successfully bring a project/policy forward and how those components interact.

Figure 1: The Strategic Triangle



Source: Kavanagh, 2014.

Public Value refers to the ways the activity or organisation in question benefits society. This idea goes beyond financial benefits to include contributions such as improving quality of life, reducing harm, increasing access and

facilitating participation. Programs or organisations offering little public value or that fail to adequately communicate their public value will struggle to gain support.

Legitimacy and Support refers to the authorising environment surrounding public managers/organisations. This includes the cast of individuals, groups and institutions with the ability to grant (or withhold) permission, approval and/or resources which can impact project progress. It also includes the broader social and political climate and legal landscape, e.g., enabling legislation.

Operational Capacity refers to the resources available to public managers/organisations such as funds, personnel, expertise and equipment. Public sector organisations are typically working with some kind of resource constraint; 'getting it done' often depends on managers' ability to leverage existing capacity or call in extra resources.

Another aspect to the strategic triangle is the way changes in any of the three areas can influence the others. For example, changes to the authorising environment can alter the public value proposition of a particular program which in turn may affect the resources available and so on.

Example approaches

1	Exercise: Create a pre-pandemic and peri-pandemic Strategic Triangle	Mapping out the Strategic Triangle in relation to telehealth, before and after COVID-19, illustrates how the model works in relation to a real-life example. It also invites students to consider how one event, i.e., the pandemic, caused a significant shift in the public value proposition that telehealth represented, attitudes in the authorising environment and resources available. This also affected the operational capacity of the Department of Health, certainly in terms of funding.
2	Discussion question: Could mainstream telehealth have happened without COVID?	With Moore's Strategic Triangle in mind, students can imagine an alternate reality without a global health crisis. Prior to COVID-19, the case notes that the Department of Health was working on primary health reform which included expanded telehealth services. Australians were already enthusiastic users of technology, keen on convenience and conducting transactions online. Yet, there doesn't seem to have been huge public demand for telehealth services. Doctors meanwhile, weren't enthused about change but were/are a powerful industry group. So it seems possible that telehealth services may have eventually grown with stronger policy backing, but also seems likely that the Department of Health would have had to work very hard to get medical associations on board.
3	Discussion question: What will telehealth need to continue successfully into the future?	Again with an eye to the Strategic Triangle, students can consider what needs to be in place for telehealth to continue as a mainstream service that delivers benefits to public health. The government, for instance, will likely need to see more evidence of value for money in order to continue Medicare support. It will also want to see that compliance issues are manageable. Doctors will want further evidence of efficacy and safety as well as assistance managing technology issues. Some segments of the public will need more support to be able to use telehealth services, while others may need reassurance that strong privacy protections are in place and that they can access the kinds of services they want.

Further Resources:

For background reading on public value and the strategic triangle:

ANZSOG. (2017). [Public admin explainer: What is public value?](https://anzsog.edu.au/research-insights-and-resources/research/what-is-public-value/), ANZSOG Research. Access via <https://anzsog.edu.au/research-insights-and-resources/research/what-is-public-value/>

Kavanagh, S. (2014). [Defining and Creating Value for the Public](#), *Government Finance Review*, 30 (5) October: 57-60.

Moore, Mark H. (2013). [Recognizing Public Value](#). Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

NSW Public Service Commission. (2023). [Strategic decision making: A guide to the 'strategic triangle' framework for effective strategic decision making](https://sef.psc.nsw.gov.au/setting-direction2c-delivering-results/strategic-decision-making). Senior Executive Fundamentals, NSW Government. Access via <https://sef.psc.nsw.gov.au/setting-direction2c-delivering-results/strategic-decision-making>

NSW Public Service Commission. (2023a). [Developing policy thinking: Strategies for developing innovative, outward-looking, evidence-based policy thinking to create public value](https://sef.psc.nsw.gov.au/setting-direction2c-delivering-results/developing-policy-thinking). Senior Executive Fundamentals, NSW Government. Access via <https://sef.psc.nsw.gov.au/setting-direction2c-delivering-results/developing-policy-thinking>

For worksheets, exercises and explanatory videos developed by George Veth and Mark Moore:

See the ['Public Value Toolkit'](https://publicvaluetoolkit.com) website via publicvaluetoolkit.com

Feedback on Teaching Note use

To assist with continual improvement, if you've used this Teaching Note, we'd greatly appreciate your feedback and suggestions for improvement. To do so, please email caselibrary@anzsog.edu.au with the name of the case and your comments. Many thanks in advance.

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