

Pioneering Virtual Care:

A Pathway to Transforming Healthcare



In May 2024, Whakarongorau convened alongside 200 sector professionals, at the annual HiNZ Digital Health Summit—a dynamic assembly of clinicians, managers, government representatives, NGO advocates, and health visionaries.

Our mission? To examine the established aspects of virtual care, while seeking to explore the unknown.

Through 40-minute sessions, participants shared wisdom, debated, worried, and wondered. The resulting intelligence was gathered using digital engagement platforms and Whakarongorau facilitators.

In setting the scene for these Virtual Care Insights, it's crucial to acknowledge the prevailing challenges across the health sector, where bright spots are few and substantial work lies ahead. However, amidst these challenges, there is a prevailing sense of optimism. Delegates who self-selected our Virtual Care table brought with them not just expertise but also a palpable energy and optimism.



What is Virtual Care?

Virtual care is increasingly becoming synonymous with telehealth: the delivery of healthcare using digital technology where the provider and the recipient are separated by time and/or distance.¹

It encompasses a range of technologies, including video consultations, text and telehealth services, remote monitoring, and digital health tools.



1. www.telehealth.org.nz

Engaging Conversations Shaping Virtual Care

At 12 discussion tables, each with diverse perspectives, we centred our focus on virtual care.

We began with a scene setter — an exploration of ‘virtual’ care in its entirety.



From there, we navigated 14 thought-provoking prompts, dissected three word-clouds, and grappled with four scenarios.

12 discussion tables...



each with diverse perspectives...



focussing on virtual care.



The goal? To stimulate rich dialogue, ignite fresh thinking, and encourage the exchange of expertise.



Who Spoke & What We Heard

- **Clinicians:** Their voices echoed a desire for trust in the health system. They recognised that patients needed confidence in virtual care—a delicate balance between efficiency and personalised connections.
- **Clinical Managers:** Their focus was on scalability. Streamlined processes mattered, but so did intuitive experiences for patients. Efficiency wasn't just about algorithms; it was about empowering lives.
- **Government Representatives:** Advocates for equity, efficiency, and system-wide improvement. They championed digital innovation, which can be tested locally and scaled nationally.
- **NGO Advocates:** Their passion lay in bridging gaps. They spoke of data-free services, empowering patients with digital literacy, and reaching priority communities.
- **Health Visionaries:** Their view extended beyond the horizon. Virtual care wasn't just a tool; it was a mindset shift. Urgency fuelled their discussions—they were focused on the need to redefine healthcare delivery.



A Blueprint for Transformative Virtual Care

We've gathered the collective wisdom of 120 sector leaders from diverse backgrounds—clinicians, managers, government representatives, NGO advocates, and health visionaries. Now, we challenge you to use these insights to inform your decision-making, set your priorities, make funding choices, and guide the direction of your initiatives.

This brochure shines a light on the intelligence of the sector and presents a unified vision for where we want to head. It's aspirational—a blueprint for a healthier, more connected New Zealand.



Insights Shaping Our Work

Key themes emerged strongly from our discussions, highlighting consistent concerns and ideas:

- + **TRUST:** It's foundational. Clinicians and patients alike demand trust in both technology and the human connections it enables.
- + **EFFICIENCY:** More than just algorithms, it's about empowerment. Clinical managers seek streamlined processes, while patients need intuitive experiences. Efficiency is critical for seamless care delivery.
- + **EQUITY:** Beyond rhetoric, it's about advocacy. Government representatives advocate for equitable access, while NGOs highlight the digital divide. Virtual care must bridge these gaps to ensure inclusivity for all.
- + **INNOVATION:** From dreams to reality. Health visionaries propel us forward, urging us to translate aspirations into actionable strategies that redefine the future of healthcare.
- + **FINANCIAL ALIGNMENT:** Effective virtual care requires funding models that align with its unique needs. We must secure resources to support technological advancements and ensure accessibility for all populations.



Core Insights from the Conference

Virtual care isn't merely an option; it's an imperative for the future of healthcare. Delegates at the conference emphasised the need to integrate trust, efficiency, equity, and funding into the very fabric of our healthcare system. As we navigate uncharted territories, these insights serve as our compass, guiding us toward a healthier, more connected New Zealand—one virtual dialogue at a time.

These insights, gathered from the HiNZ Digital Health conference, are not just for us to understand but also to share widely with our peers in the health sector. The true potential unfolds when we place these insights at the heart of our strategic planning and continuous improvement efforts.



TRUST: The Currency of Virtual Care

“Build on the trusted relationships to develop the conducive environment for technology use.”

“We need to build trust in our virtual care system by ensuring data security and transparency.”

“Get around cognitive overlay that makes it hard to access the tools—fear, anxiety in an emergency, how do we get to the tool/app/system we need when we need it.”



In virtual care, trust means having confidence that the system can provide safe, effective, and reliable healthcare. This involves believing that virtual care will work without technical problems, that healthcare professionals can deliver quality care online, that personal health information is secure, and that virtual care can diagnose and treat conditions alongside in-person care.

Building Trust in the System

- **Transparency:** Clear communication about data privacy, security, and system reliability is crucial. Robust protocols must assure patients that their information is safeguarded.
- **Reliability:** Consistent performance and seamless user experiences are non-negotiable. System downtime erodes trust.
- **Empathy:** Human-centred design must acknowledge patient fears and concerns, making virtual care feel personal, not clinical.

Fostering Trust Between Patients and Technology

- **Education:** Empower patients to understand and navigate virtual care tools.
- **Personalisation:** Tailor solutions to individual needs, fostering confidence. A one-size-fits-all approach won't suffice.
- **Peer Support:** Leverage lived experience communities to share experiences and build trust through real stories.

EFFICIENCY: Beyond Streamlining, Toward Empowerment

“Tactical bots to review cases and case information to enable fast triaging.”

“Redirect non-emergencies to telehealth for efficient care, easing strain on EDs.”

“Straight to browser to get what you need, less applications to download, fewer clicks to get where you need to go.”



Insights from discussions highlight a shift towards using technology for both efficiency and empowerment in healthcare. Delegates referenced early work designing tactical AI tools for swift case triage, easing ED burdens while supporting clinician decision-making. They also stressed the need for virtual care to offer an intuitive digital experience, simplifying access and empowering patients with proactive health tools.

AI Tools and Triage

- **Swift Case Review:** Tactical chat bots could prioritise urgent cases, easing the strain on emergency departments, augmenting, not replacing, human judgment.
- **Empowering Providers:** Free up clinicians' time for critical decision-making, ensuring virtual care enhances rather than burdens their workflows.
- **Patient Prioritisation:** Assist in triage and patient prioritisation, acting as virtual navigators for health and well-being care.

Seamless Digital Experience

- **Intuitive Access:** Virtual care should be as easy as accessing a ride-share, with streamlined logins and intuitive interfaces to eliminate barriers.
- **Patient Empowerment:** Enable self-management and proactive health monitoring, teaching patients to interpret data and act on it.

EQUITY: Bridging the Divide

“Devices not readily available to all, need to consider remote devices as essential tools.”

“Reliance on one size fits all for access for consumers—especially with ageing population. Long-term conditions affect senses required for effective access—visual, hearing, motor and cognitive.”



Discussions highlighted the need to enhance healthcare access and equity. Recommendations include expanding internet availability to rural and community settings, treating remote devices as vital medical tools with subsidies, and offering data-free services to ensure equitable access for all, especially those with accessibility challenges. Delegates reiterated that whānau-centred care must ensure that healthcare services are inclusive, built with principles of whānau-centred care and the commitment to by Māori, for Māori health services. Virtual care must align with these cultural values to be effective and equitable.

Internet Access for All

- **Extend Internet Availability:** Ensure reliable connectivity in libraries, community centres, and rural areas.
- **Remote Devices:** Treat remote devices as essential medical tools and subsidise or provide them where needed.
- **Data-Free Services:** Ensure equitable access to virtual care regardless of data plans, as health shouldn't depend on data limits.

Whānau-Centred Care

- **Inclusivity:** Design Māori for Māori healthcare services that acknowledge and incorporate the whānau context, ensuring that care plans are supportive of and inclusive to family members.
- **Multi-Participant Sessions:** Develop virtual care platforms that support multiple participants in a single session, allowing whānau members to join consultations and support their loved ones.
- **Holistic Care Plans:** Create care plans that consider the broader social and cultural context of patients, incorporating Rongoā Māori and the input and support of whānau in treatment decisions.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Recognise the cultural values and traditions of patients and their families, integrating these into care plans to foster trust and better health outcomes.
- **Support Systems:** Strengthen support systems that enable whānau and families to participate actively in the care process, providing resources and education to assist them in supporting their family members.

LEVERAGING AUTOMATION: Guiding Clinicians, Empowering Patients

“Machine learning assists specialists in diagnostics and treatment planning.”

“Could technology be a virtual navigator—supporting health and well-being care and wider needs as well.”



Insights into healthcare automation underscore its transformative impact on both clinicians and patients. Discussions reveal how machine learning could enhance diagnostics and treatment planning, while advanced pathology scanning extends diagnostic capabilities. These technological advancements act as a safety net, aggregating data to inform decision-making. Alongside clear policies, education, and a balanced approach combining virtual and face-to-face care, these insights illuminate the path toward safer and more effective healthcare delivery.

Clinical Guide and Decision Support

- **Machine Learning:** Assist specialists in diagnostics and treatment planning, with algorithms augmenting, not replacing, expertise.
- **Pathology Scanning:** Uncover subtle patterns beyond human capability, facilitating early detection.
- **AI Second Opinions:** Augment clinical expertise and reduce bias while maintaining human oversight.
- **Clinical Safety Net:** Technology can serve as a tool for clinicians and patients, summarising, aggregating, and analysing information to support decision-making.

Balancing Innovation and Safety

- **Clear Policies:** Establish protocols for AI and automation use, ensuring ethical and safe deployment.
- **Education and Training:** Equip clinicians with the skills to leverage new tools effectively.
- **Human Touch:** Retain the balance between virtual and in-person care, ensuring patients still feel the warmth of human connection.

FINANCIAL ALIGNMENT: Funding Models for Virtual Care

“Have to ensure that funding models align with virtual care requirements.”



Virtual care’s effective implementation necessitates funding models tailored to its unique needs. Key insights call for a recalibration of financial frameworks to support technological advancements, ensuring the sustainability and accessibility of virtual healthcare services. By aligning funding with the evolving landscape of healthcare, we can ensure that virtual care remains a viable and integral component of our health system, accessible to all populations.



Securing Resources for Advancement

- **Investment in Technology:** Allocate funds to develop and maintain advanced virtual care platforms, ensuring they are robust, secure, and user-friendly.
- **Subsidies for Accessibility:** Provide financial support for remote devices and data-free services, ensuring equitable access to virtual care for all, regardless of socioeconomic status.
- **Sustainable Funding Models:** Develop innovative funding strategies that align with the needs of virtual care, ensuring long-term viability and integration within the healthcare system.

Conclusion: The Journey Ahead

These insights gathered from the HiNZ Digital Health Summit by Whakarongorau Aotearoa / New Zealand Telehealth Services are more than just words; they represent a collective commitment to reshaping virtual care. As we pioneer new paths in healthcare, these insights can guide our decisions, fuel our strategies, and inspire our actions.

As we move forward, we must also establish robust evaluation frameworks and stringent quality assurance measures. The rapid expansion of digital health services demands meticulous monitoring to ensure efficacy, safety, and equitable access. By continually evaluating outcomes and refining practices, we can safeguard against pitfalls and maximize the transformative potential of virtual care. It's crucial that growth in this area is carefully managed, aligning technological advancements with patient-centred outcomes and system-wide efficiencies.

What's Next?

In an era where technology intersects with healthcare, virtual care emerges as a transformative force. Why? Because it bridges gaps, empowers patients, and enhances clinical practice. However, navigating this evolving landscape requires strategic approaches to address challenges, embrace innovation, and foster collaboration. These insights serve as a guide for healthcare providers, policymakers, and technology advocates to embrace virtual care, making it not just an option, but an imperative.

Whakarongorau invites you to embark on this transformative journey. Let's champion virtual care, not merely as an option, but as our imperative. Together, we redefine care, one digital connection at a time.

Contact Us

For more information and to join the conversation on virtual care, visit our website at www.whakarongorau.nz or follow us on [LinkedIn](#)

