



# The Potential of Virtual Care

Recognising consistent improvement and high performance at Tasmanian Health Service (THS) COVID@homeplus service

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## Background

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth adoption was far from widespread. Despite the obvious benefit of improving access to healthcare, the technology wasn't in place, consumers weren't ready, and providers resisted the shift to virtual care. Then came the pandemic – suddenly telehealth was in high demand. The COVID-19 crisis caused unprecedented disruption in healthcare around the world.

Delivering safe, high-quality care that affords patients the greater convenience of meeting them where they are, has now become the guiding objective, requiring patient-centeredness, clinician engagement and leveraging of technology to achieve it.

## What is the COVID@homeplus program?



The THS COVID@homeplus is an innovative nurse-led program, that brings together acute community and primary care to provide safe and effective in-home health care via telehealth technology for vulnerable patients with COVID-19 or other respiratory illnesses. The program has a secure scalable digital health platform that enables individuals to monitor their symptoms, vital signs, and wellbeing. COVID@homeplus is a 24-hour 7 days per week service, which offers a multidisciplinary healthcare team who work together to perform assessments, risk stratification, and monitor and manage patients' COVID journeys safely.

COVID@homeplus commenced on December 15th 2021 and has since provided care to over 34,000 Tasmanians.

We had a conversation with COVID@homeplus Nursing Director, Trudi Steedman and Nurse Unit Manager, Jane Palfreyman, to find out more about their approach to virtual care and what they are doing differently to achieve these outcomes. Here is the THS COVID@homeplus success story.

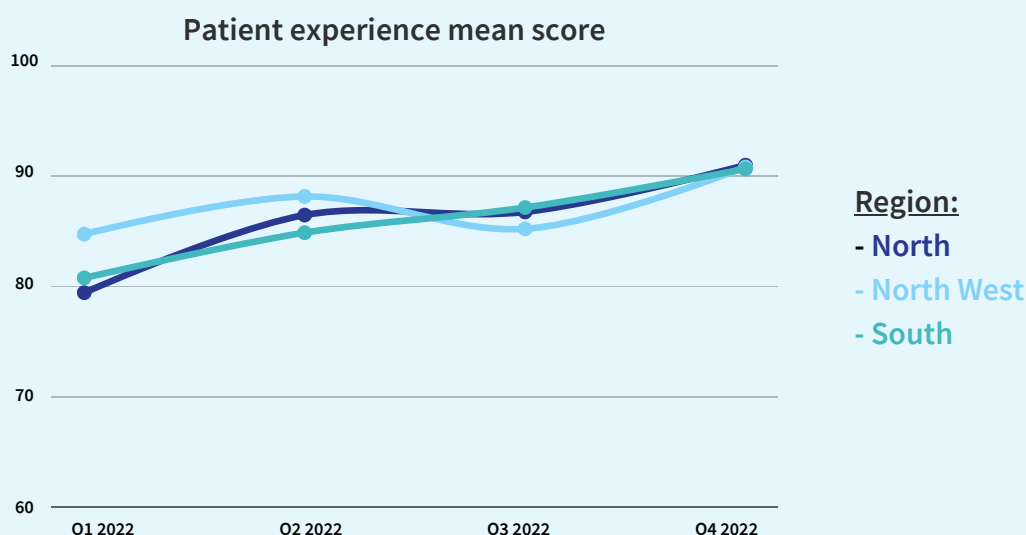
*Note: Data used in this article was collected from THS COVID@homeplus patient experience survey via email and SMS between Oct-Dec 2022.*

## Why does THS's COVID@homeplus program stand out?

Despite the declining trend of patient experience, THS's COVID@homeplus patient experience has maintained consistently high scores since they commenced the service and improved significantly in the last quarter of 2022.



A deep dive into the regional-level data from Q1 2022 to Q4 2022 shows that while each area may have started at varying levels, they have all attained a high standard at present.



**Patients frequently comment on the great care and support they receive:**

“The level of follow-up and care was simply amazing. I couldn’t speak highly enough of the staff that assisted me.”

“There was always someone to talk to if I ever had a concern.”

“Being able to check my pulse and oxygen levels whenever I felt concerned. I found it very reassuring to be able to check and know for sure that my levels were within normal ranges. It reduced my anxiety significantly.”

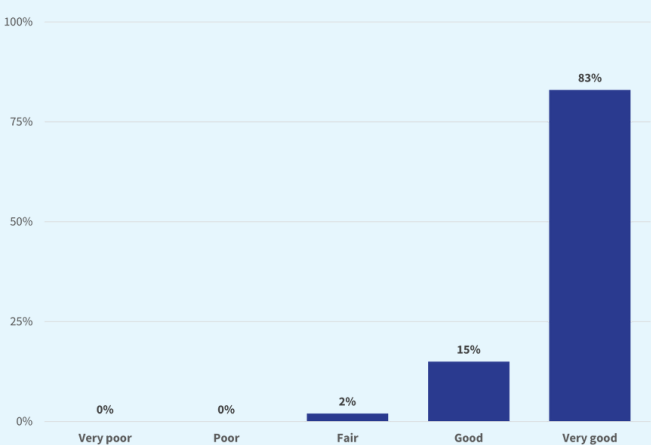
“Knowing that help if necessary was only a phone call away. Also, the speed the nursing staff contact a patient if results are out of parameters [is great].”



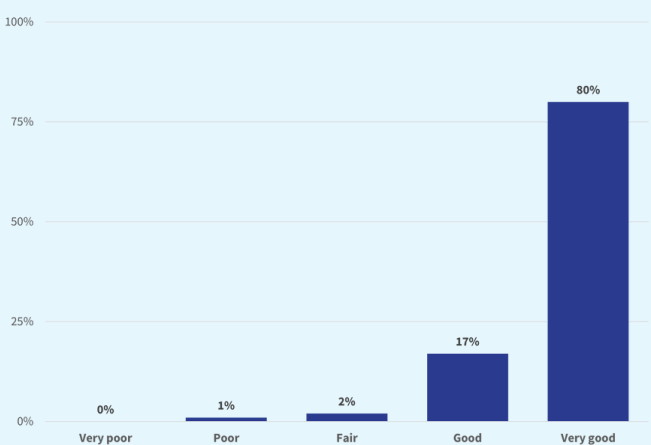
# Strengths of THS's COVID@homeplus program

The survey findings indicated the service’s strengths primarily lie in how staff members interact with patients. Staff were specifically noted for treating patients with respect and dignity, providing ample opportunities to ask questions, and showing deep respect for cultural, racial, and religious needs. Additionally, respondents praised the ability of staff to clearly explain care procedures and work seamlessly together to provide quality care.

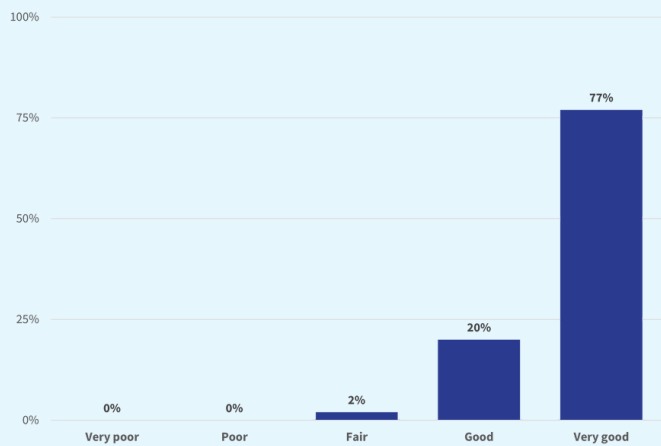
Staff treat patients with respect and dignity



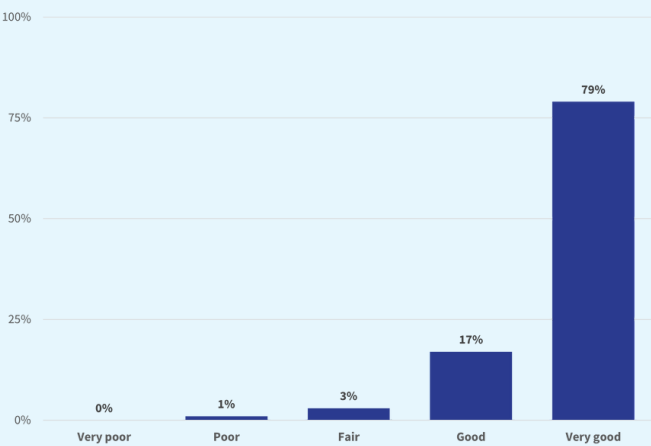
Staff provided opportunity to ask questions



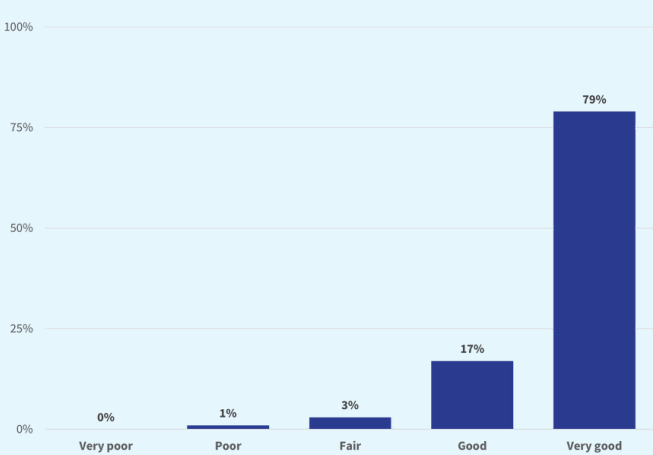
Staff respected patients’ cultural, racial, and religious needs



Staff's explanation about care



Staff worked well together to provide care





# How did THS achieve virtual care success?

1.

## Teamwork and engagement

COVID@homeplus is a program that has shown an agile and seamless response to new challenges. Their staff are engaged in all aspects of the program, from delivering outstanding patient care and service to developing the model of care and initiatives. The team respects the different experiences and strengths of each staff member and relies on this experience to enhance their service. The multidisciplinary team members are champions of change and can pivot and adapt to the community's needs without restriction.

2.

## Training and education

To ensure safety and quality, COVID@homeplus developed an orientation package – a live document that is to be continually evaluated and updated by the Clinical Nurse Consultants (CNCs). The CNCs have also developed an intranet education site as a great resource for the team. The site is accessible at any time to all staff working at COVID@homeplus and provides up-to-date information regarding guidelines, protocols, model of care and education sessions.

3.

## Technology and communication

As COVID@homeplus is a virtual healthcare program, the team have embraced this by including IT and virtual care throughout the whole process. Their main communication platform is Microsoft Teams, and education sessions are recorded using a QR code. Electronic assessment forms, limited paper-based protocols and all relevant information is made available electronically.

4.

## Strong values

COVID@homeplus have developed strong unit values which underpin the model and delivery of care. Each team member is valued, and these attributes are shown through the COVID@homeplus outstanding care delivered to Tasmanians. COVID@homeplus place importance on that the fact that they listen, care and advocate for their consumers with kindness and empathy, and with the consumer at the centre of their program.

5.

## Person-centred care

COVID@homeplus focuses on continually developing a person-centred culture. They have integrated evidence-based care, involving all stakeholders through collaboration and evaluation of consumer and staff feedback. Their multidisciplinary team continue to review processes and systems to adapt and transform care in the ever-changing environment to manage the ongoing challenges which continually arise within a pandemic.

The COVID@homeplus clinical team take the time to listen and support the individual enrolled in the service. The clients are well supported by the virtual care team, which enables full engagement in the MyCare Manager device. The 24-hour 7 days per week nature of the service provides the community with confidence that they will be able to promptly discuss concerns/issues about their health.

## COVID@homeplus is a real-world example of how virtual care programs can respond seamlessly and agilely to new challenges.

THS developed a multidisciplinary team that values teamwork, engagement, and training, with a focus on developing a person-centred culture that integrates evidence-based care and involves all stakeholders. The COVID@homeplus team have embraced virtual healthcare and developed strong unit values that underpin the model and delivery of care, with the consumer positioned firmly at the centre of their program.

These attributes have allowed COVID@homeplus to provide outstanding care to Tasmanians and continually adapt and transform their care in the ever-changing and challenging environment of a pandemic.

**THS serve as a model for other healthcare organisations looking to offer virtual care services that prioritise patient-centred care, evidence-based practices, and teamwork through COVID and beyond.**

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Working at COVID@homeplus has opened my eyes to the potential possibilities that the virtual healthcare space can provide. Assisting those who are alone, vulnerable, and needing support is a rewarding experience, the gratitude from these patients who may otherwise struggle alone highlights how well the program works.

– COVID@homeplus team member

I am proud to be a part of the COVID@homeplus team. Our team of experienced health professionals are united in supporting our patients through their illness in a caring and respectful manner.

– COVID@homeplus team member

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