



## Does telehealth work?

**MALT Message: Evidence of success is important to all those with an interest in telehealth including clinicians, commissioners, end users and industry. Mixed reports of the clinical and cost effectiveness of telehealth have led to uncertainties about how to invest and the clinical outcomes that are important to measure.**

Best evidence is required to inform health care investment. In other words what works and is also

cost effective. For some interventions this is straight forward; for example the evidence to support investment in a new drug. However, for complex interventions such as telehealth, this is more challenging due to the range of applications, use in practice, and the necessary involvement of multiple stakeholders.

Measuring the success of telehealth is therefore an on-going challenge, particularly in services where the underpinning goals for use of the technology are unclear.

## Debunking the evidence and defining success

### MYTH: Telehealth is not cost effective

One study alone, no matter how big, cannot tell us if telehealth is a cost effective intervention in all situations. Well designed local evaluations that meet the needs of all stakeholders are the best way to determine if a telehealth service is successful.



*'I had some concerns because I think in the NICE guidance for heart failure, you know, they was saying that there wasn't really that much evidence.'*

### MYTH: Telehealth increases staff workload

Some of the early telehealth services created more work for clinicians due to a general lack of knowledge about how to support the delivery of remote care. Clinicians must be assisted to identify a patient pathway for telehealth from referral to discharge. Resources have to be identified (including staff training) to enable delivery of the new pathway.



### MYTH: Measuring success is too complex

Telehealth services are complicated even in situations where devices are used in one setting with a single clear objective. The unique setting for delivery will inevitably influence both clinical and cost effectiveness. Nevertheless, local evaluations can provide important information about the outcomes of using telehealth. The value of such evaluations can be enhanced by agreeing a core set of outcome measures with key stakeholders, including commissioners. Ideally, outcome data should be readily collected as part of routine clinical practice.



### MYTH: Telehealth needs to save money



*'We attempted to look at the cost effectiveness aspect of it ... but there were of course secondary outcomes, things around reducing length of stay, patient satisfaction, carers and the users as well.'*

Remote care technologies are often promoted as an efficient and cost effective solution. However, there are multiple goals for telehealth and many applications. This means that success might not always be about cost effectiveness. For example it might be about helping people to manage their own long term condition more effectively.