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### **Telehealth clinics breaking down barriers to access for patients**

If distance is a barrier to good health care for your whānau, Waitematā DHB's new trial service could be the answer to get more people the help they need as well as saving them time and money.

Richard Harris, 75, of Wellsford is one of first people to take advantage of the Waitematā DHB telehealth clinic trial, an innovation enabling patients to have medical appointments via video link from the comfort of home, work or wherever it suits.

After three heart attacks and a quadruple bypass 10 years ago, Mr Harris faces the possibility of regular hospital check-ups for the rest of his life. This potentially means a 142km round trip to North Shore Hospital every few months.

"I can't drive because of my heart condition, so one of my children would have to come with me but that's a big ask to take a whole day out," he says.

"I will sometimes take a shuttle but because we're picking up a few people all over the place, I can leave at 7am and not get home until after 5pm. I appreciate the service but that is a long day for someone who isn't well."

Over 300 telehealth clinic appointments have been carried out over the past 12 months.

Mr Harris doesn't have a computer at home and instead used one at Te Ha Oranga clinic in Wellsford where a nurse sat in with him while he had his telehealth clinic appointment.

The clinic is just seven minutes from his home.

"No travelling and no waiting around. It was an easy option for me," he says.

Waitematā DHB is among the first DHBs in the country to offer specialist appointments wherever the patient wants, across a wide variety of services.

Waitematā DHB Clinical Director for Otorhinolaryngology Dr David Grayson says telehealth clinics are designed to break down a common barrier to good health care – access.

"For some patients, this has meant they haven't needed to leave work, travel great distances or, in some instances, take their sick child out of the home, avoiding exposure to potentially bad weather and other illnesses in the waiting room of a hospital," he says.

"Video-calling can also be done multiple ways. That means Nana could be in Auckland on a video call to her clinician while her daughter tunes in from Nelson or an interpreter joins the

call. This will change the game for many of our patients, their families, whānau and our clinicians who will be able to see many patients who would otherwise miss appointments.

CEO Dr Dale Bramley says Waitematā DHB is committed to finding innovative ways to reduce inequities and barriers to accessing good health care.

“Mr Harris is a gold-standard example of how new innovations and thinking outside the box can pay off,” he says.

“I want to thank Mr Harris and the 300 other patients who took advantage of this opportunity, helping us to develop this new service that will open doors for people to get the help they need, especially for some of more vulnerable people in the community.”

Waitematā DHB hopes to be able to offer more telehealth clinics over a wider variety of services and specialties within the next few years.

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**For further information contact:**

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#### **About Waitematā DHB**

Waitematā DHB serves the largest population of any district health board in New Zealand, currently standing at more than 630,000 people. We have a workforce of more than 7,500 staff spread across more than 80 sites, including North Shore Hospital and Waitakere Hospital. We are also the Northern Region provider of forensic psychiatry and child disability services, plus the metro Auckland provider of child community dental services and community alcohol and drug services.