

What is Project Echo?

Project ECHO® (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) is an evidence-based model which places healthcare providers from diverse settings in direct contact with subject matter experts. Project ECHO originated at the University of New Mexico with a mission to “demonopolize knowledge and amplify the capacity to provide best practice care for underserved people all over the world.”

The four-point ECHO model:

- Use technology (teleECHO) - multipoint videoconferencing and the internet - to leverage scarce resources and create knowledge networks
- Improve outcomes by reducing variation in processes of care and sharing best practice
- Use case-based learning: guided practice through real-life cases with a multidisciplinary team of SMEs to facilitate learning by doing
- Tracking of data to monitor outcomes.

The heart of the ECHO model is its **hub-and-spoke knowledge-sharing networks**, led by expert teams who use **multi-point videoconferencing to conduct regular virtual clinics with community providers**. In this way, primary care doctors, nurses, and other clinicians learn to provide excellent specialty care to patients in their own communities.

Each ECHO session consists **of a brief presentation from a set curriculum designed in consultation with potential participants, followed by a participant-led case presentation with facilitated discussion**. Following sessions, a brief written summary of the presented case with treatment recommendations is provided to participants, along with links to evidence-based resources. Project ECHO has been considered as an effective means to engage clinicians with peer-to-peer learning opportunities (**more structured than Communities of Practice and more resourced**).

Participation is not limited to RACGP/ACCRM members, nor to general practice, and can include allied health, specialists and any other relevant professionals, however the focus remains on improvement of general practice care.

Cost and Benefit to GP

- There is no fee for GPs to participate
- CPD points can be gained through either 40 CPD Accredited Activity for attendance at a minimum of 5 hours (Peer Group Learning) or via self-directed activity
- Access to free specialist expertise and consultation
- Building relationships with peers from across Western Australia who share practice interests
- Online method gives access for regional and remote, with a strong track record in this method of delivery.

WAPHA's approach to Project ECHO

WAPHA has recently completed registration as the first ECHO replication partner in WA. Replication is the implementation of the ECHO model, based on community needs and resources, with training and technical assistance from the ECHO institute and superhubs. Australia's superhub is operated by [Children's Health Queensland](#).

ECHO Networks are usually structured to run weekly or fortnightly, often with requirement of upfront commitment to a series of sessions. WAPHA is piloting a drop-in structure, allowing for flexibility for GP participation, whilst removing the requirement for upfront commitment. The pilot Network will be on the topic of AOD, with an evaluation to consider utility of the approach in WA

and applicability to other topics. The focus will be on learning through doing, with the support of a network of peers and specialists either statewide or in more localized groups.

Anticipated Outcomes

- Improved treatment of AOD addiction problems in general practice, including GP confidence in engaging with patients regarding AOD issues.
- Improved health outcomes of people experiencing AOD addiction, through positive and effective treatment of AOD in primary care
- Increased capability of WAPHA staff to support general practice to address AOD issues through quality improvement activities.
- Enhanced networks and improved relationships between general practitioners, alcohol and other drug specialists and other health professionals.

Opportunities

- Online interactive learning offers opportunity for State-wide/national reach - ECHO has a proven track record in supporting regional and remote practitioners.
- Option for both a state and regional approach to support practitioners in priority geographic precincts.
- Opportunity for dissemination of resources and connections to international research and practice through the ECHO Institute and ECHO Collaborative
- Opportunity to build on existing relationships between WA addiction medicine specialists and GPs, including Next Step and RACGP Addiction Medicine interest groups.
- Built-in evaluation component to test value and potential ongoing commitment and expansion of ECHO model to other topics. Evaluation will explore the model's potential benefits to the WA Primary Care community.
- Active support and involvement of key stakeholders including:
 - RACGP (both national and WA branch)
 - Treating Alcohol and other Drugs in Primary Care program (TADPole) led by Dr Moira Sim
 - Dr Richard O'Regan, Next Step (Director of Clinical Services) who participates as a mentor in the National RACGP AOD training program and oversees the Drug and Alcohol Clinical Advisory Service.
 - Dr Dana Newcomb, Medical Director Integrated Care Children's Health Queensland

Challenges:

- Level of interest from WA clinicians is unconfirmed. WAPHA will actively promote the opportunity and particularly target practitioners who have participated in the RACGP, ACRRM and TADPOLE alcohol and other drug education and training programs.
- Multidisciplinary commitment required to an expert panel at regular ECHO learning sessions.
- Reliance on internet connectivity - potential for limited access in a rural/remote setting.