

Does video conferencing deliver the message?

What is Equity-Focused Health Impact Assessment

EFHIA is a means of measuring the potential impacts of a policy or practice on the health of the population. The EFHIA framework was developed by the Australasian Collaboration for Health Equity Impact Assessment and tested in 2004 using a number of case studies in Australia and New Zealand.

Why add Equity to the Health Impact Assessment

An equity approach recognises that not everyone has the same level of health or resources to deal with their health problem, therefore it is important to consider this in order to work towards equal outcomes. Adding an equity focus to the current HIA process and approach will allow it to be strengthened and it will allow policy makers to specifically focus on the differing needs of population groups.

Using a videoconferencing program to test the EFHIA framework

The Support Scheme for Rural Specialists funds continuing professional development (CPD) projects for rural specialists. One strategy used for delivering continuing professional development is videoconferencing. However, does funding such projects that use videoconferencing have equity implications amongst specialists more generally?

A review of the published literature, consultation with colleagues, experts and stakeholders indicated that videoconferencing was widely regarded as having potential to improve professional development for rural specialists. Also, it can potentially have flow-on effects for communities served by those specialists. However, where technology fails to keep pace with available programs, videoconferencing may widen disparity between specialists, with flow-on effects to the communities they serve.

What does this mean for the future delivery of CPD via video conferencing?

- Funding for CPD delivered by videoconferencing will continue to be supported, however a number of issues should be considered when planning such events, including:
 - timeliness;
 - target group's access to the technology;
 - target group's understanding of how to use the technology;
 - consultation with target group during event planning.
- Consideration and support should be given to alternative means of delivering education where telemedicine technology is not available.
- Liaison with metropolitan institutions should be encouraged to support the transfer of CPD offered in metropolitan locations to rural areas.
- The roll-out and updating of technology should be monitored to ensure equity of distribution throughout rural Australia by liaison with telemedicine units at the relevant State Health Departments.
- Ensuring that people know the uses and benefits of the technology; how to access the technology is equally important to ensure it is utilised to its fullest capacity.

For more information on the EFHIA Process and Framework, contact Dr Rosemary Aldrich: Rosemary.Aldrich@newcastle.edu.au.

For more information on the SSRS program or Videoconferencing case study, contact Lauren Dalton: lauren.dalton@racp.edu.au.