
Using Project ECHO™ to Address Childhood Overweight and Obesity

Initiative Type

Model of Care

Status

Deliver

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Summary

Project ECHO™ is an innovative model of telementoring and case based learning, designed to "democratise medical knowledge" and deliver practical medical care to patients in communities that

lack ready access to specialists. Whether the difficulty accessing specialists is due to remoteness, poverty, cultural barriers or other factors, ECHO helps to address the inequity faced by those patients. Through videoconferencing technology and a structured case presentation format, local healthcare providers including nurses, community healthcare workers and GPs are mentored by experts in metropolitan centres to deliver specialist-level care. There are currently very limited public health services in Queensland for children who are overweight or obese. Health practitioners often do not want to treat them because they either do not want to raise the topic, no secondary services exist, or they are unsure of the treatment options. Tertiary services are delivered from the Lady Cilento Children's Hospital with satellite sites at Ipswich and Logan to help manage this problem. The paediatric obesity ECHO series has been introduced to scale access to specialist advice, supporting providers across Queensland to build sustainability, enhance system capacity, and grow an empowered workforce. As frontline service providers, GPs can support systematic change and build capacity to combat this issue, ensuring evidence-based care is provided for children and families into the future. Using Project ECHO™ as an enabler in the public healthcare system, it ensures maximum integration of care across providers, facilitating more practitioners in delivering ongoing, family-centred specialist care and management of children who are overweight or obese in their local community, regardless of geography. To ensure we provide the right care to the right patient at the right time, the Project ECHO™ paediatric obesity series continues to be delivered to GPs and other primary healthcare professionals statewide with impressive results thus far.

Key dates

Jul 2016

Implementation sites

Children's Health Queensland

Partnerships

Preventive Health Branch, Healthcare Improvement Unit, Queensland Child and Youth Clinical Network, The University of Queensland

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2024

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Aim

Increase access to specialty care in rural and under-served areas by providing frontline clinicians with the specialist-level care and support they need to manage complex patients.

Benefits

- Family-centred care (less travel, expense, and time lost from school and/or work).
- Flexibility in appointment scheduling and availability.
- Greater anonymity (less stigma).
- Patients have greater trust in GPs who tend to be more culturally in tune with their local communities.

Background

Childhood obesity is a significant health, economic and social problem, with one out of four Queensland children overweight or obese. This substantially increases the risk of developing both medical and psychological comorbidities, and is considered a chronic disease in its own right. Effective weight management in childhood and adolescence is essential to minimise the risk of overweight and obesity persisting into adulthood.

Solutions Implemented

Developed the first Australian childhood overweight and obesity Project ECHO™ series completed March 2018 with series 2-4 planned. Aim is to upskill and empower health professionals statewide in the treatment and prevention of childhood obesity, leading to more kids treated locally and closer to home.

Lessons Learnt

Project ECHO™ is about moving knowledge not patients.

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