

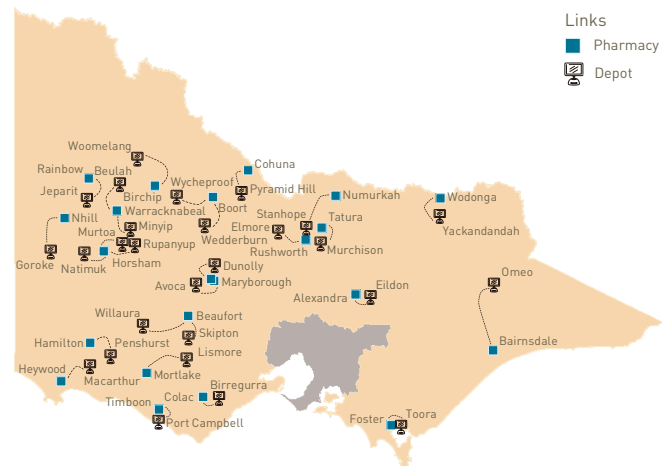
Health service delivery

Telehealth is the use of telecommunications to provide services from a distance. These services include: information exchange; training delivery; consultation; and diagnostic services (also known as telemedicine). The use of telemedicine in rural areas has increased in recent years, although usually as an adjunct to face-to-face services rather than a replacement. For example, local doctors can link patients with specialists who are located elsewhere, thus avoiding the need for long distance travel to access certain services. Despite the benefits of telehealth, there are limitations to its use. Infrastructure availability, cost, training and technical support can also present challenges.

Pharmacy services

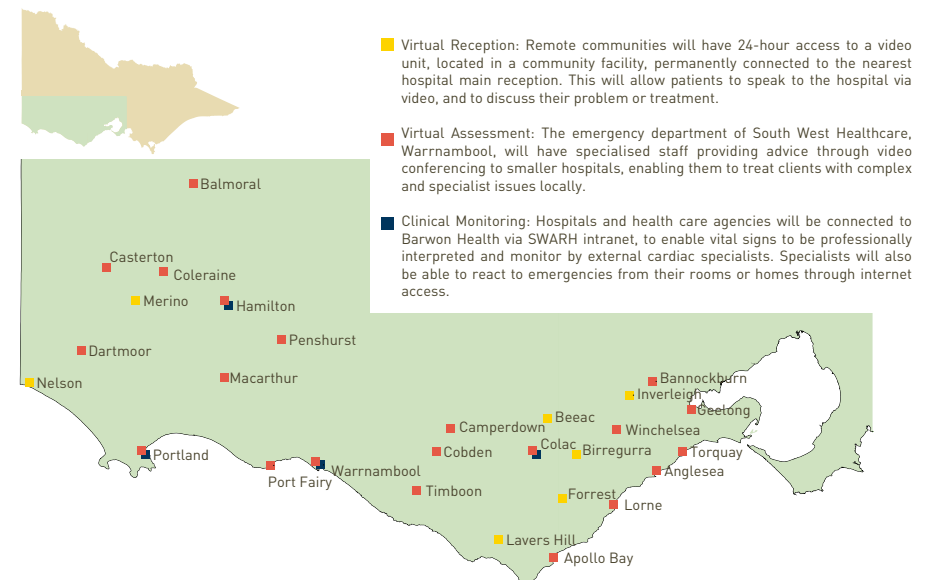
Victoria has established a video-conferencing project for use by pharmacies which links pharmacy services across rural and regional communities. The installation of the video-link enables a pharmacist in a larger town to make face-to-face contact and provide essential information on prescription and over-the-counter medicines to pharmacy-owned depots in smaller communities unable to sustain a fulltime pharmacy business.

Towns using pharmacy video-conferencing, June 2005¹



Virtual services throughout the South-West²

South West Alliance of Rural Health (SWARH)



Telehealth in Victoria

In July 2005 the South West Alliance of Rural Health launched a Virtual Services Project which is using broadband systems to deliver medical services to around 30 locations in south-west Victoria. Other parts of the state are increasingly using videoconferencing facilities for health service provision with the privately co-ordinated Directory of Telehealth Videoconferencing Facilities listing 9 Victorian locations with available facilities - Bairnsdale, Korumburra, Echuca, Traralgon, Mildura, Robinvale, Foster, Mildura and Wangaratta.³