

## **Reforming the Clinical Trial Sector Requires a Purpose-Aligned System Culture**

In 2023 when Eamon Lynham was diagnosed with an aggressive brain cancer, his father, Surgeon Dr Anthony Lynham sought out a clinical trial. After a frantic and frustrating search he found one, but by then it was too late. In the lead up to the Federal election, Dr Lynham shared his story with *ABC News* to highlight the difficulties faced in accessing clinical trials in Australia.

Over the past two decades, there have been numerous reviews and recommendations for improving the visibility and accessibility of clinical trials, but there has been limited progress.

Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) President, Professor Sabe Sabesan said, “If someone working in the health system and living in a major metropolitan area is unable to navigate the system what hope do more vulnerable populations have?”

In 2018 COSA’s Rural and Regional Group, in consultation with clinical trial sponsors, clinicians, health administrators and regulatory bodies, developed the Australasian Teletrial Model to increase access to clinical trials for people with cancer living in rural and remote locations. This ‘hub and spoke’ model uses telehealth technology to enable clinicians from larger centres (primary sites/‘hubs’) to enrol, consent and treat patients on clinical trials at regional and rural centres (satellites/‘spokes’).

Professor Sabesan said, “As well as increasing access to cancer patients in rural and remote locations, the Teletrial Model has the potential to connect larger centres, even within the same city, to improve the rate of recruitment to clinical trials for rare cancers.”

After a successful pilot, the Teletrial Model attracted ongoing funding from the Federal Government Medical Research Future Fund, but uptake could be faster to ensure more people with cancer can access clinical trials.

“Millions of dollars have been invested in programs to improve access to clinical trials, including \$18.8 million to support the development of a National One Stop Shop,” said Professor Sabesan. “But Teletrials and a One Stop Shop need to be supported by the entire health ecosystem if they are to succeed.”

“COSA believes that improving the workplace culture in the health system is necessary to deliver positive changes like improving access to cancer clinical trials,” said Professor Sabesan. “We know great cancer care relies on a healthy whole-of-system culture because of its integrated nature.”

COSA has developed a Health Workplace Culture Framework which focuses on the collective, systemic and structural aspects of workplace culture. The foundation of the framework is team-based functioning, using co-design methodology for problem solving, and aligning values and purpose across all layers of the system.

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Applying COSA's Healthy Workplace Culture Framework to address issues around access to clinical trials involves:

- Having all layers of the system – from health ministers and health bureaucrats to frontline clinicians – truly adopt clinical trials and teletrials as core business
- Ensuring our regulatory processes are fit-for-purpose to support a networked, modern clinical trial system
- Removing duplication and variability
- Harnessing key stakeholders – the pharmaceutical industry, trial groups, Therapeutic Goods Administration, Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care etc – to help drive system-wide adoption
- Allocating responsibility for championing and monitoring the system, and enabling it when it is not functioning

“COSA echoes the growing call for comprehensive reform of the clinical trial sector and related health equity programs,” said Professor Sabesan. “This must be done through a whole-of-system culture lens. It is clear fragmented, piecemeal solutions are not working.”

“It is time for cultural transformation of the Australian healthcare system. Cancer patients and the clinicians who care for them deserve nothing less.”

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### Media Enquiries

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### About COSA

The Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) is Australia's peak multidisciplinary society bringing together health professionals across all cancers to advance care and improve outcomes. COSA is recognised as an activist organisation whose views are valued in all aspects of cancer care. We are allied with and provide high-level clinical advice to Cancer Council Australia.

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