

Case study 8: The importance of a supportive champion

With support from the local DHB and PHO, a non-profit's online health directory developed content to emphasise regional health priorities in Canterbury.

Linkage Trust is a non-profit, community organisation providing free, professional and confidential support and information services. Linkage Trust began in Hamilton in 1998 and launched the **Webhealth** website in 2004 to enhance community accessibility to self-assistance for health and well-being.

Webhealth is an online directory¹ of health and social services such as counselling, mental health support, medical services, doctors, community events, and health information. Around 7,000 New Zealand providers are listed on Webhealth – covering eight DHB regions (Waitemata, Auckland, Counties Manukau, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Lakes, Taranaki and Canterbury). Each region's focus is different based on the targets and use that funders identify.

Linkage Trust has a strong presence in Waikato, where it began, and has gradually built relationships in other regions – often through word-of-mouth or positive referrals.

“Within each region we ascertain what priorities and focus a funder wants to take, and a Webhealth region could have multiple funders and priorities to meet local needs,” says Linkage Trust General Manager, Letticia Mincham.

There is scope for Webhealth to cover other regions too. Funders can choose to contract just for the website or for the “eyes and ears on the ground” as well. Funding for local staff ensures high quality information through networking with health and social service providers and inspires the local community and providers to engage and use the resource.

“Linkage Trust originated from a partnership between the **Waikato DHB**, **Pathways Trust**, and **Pinnacle** who at the time represented many of Hamilton's GPs. We are also involved in other groups and projects – so you develop a reputation for doing good work and that creates opportunities,” explains Letticia.

“Our involvement in national networks like **Platform Trust**² has also been very useful, as they help connect us with others and inform our relationship building.

“We approach DHB funding and planning people, councils and PHOs, as well as corporate, to grow Linkage services in their regions – but it works best where we have key relationships within the local community.”

There is no charge to be listed on Webhealth and providers can update their own contact information and service descriptions. A verification process and accreditation check is undertaken before provider details are made live. Webhealth's success has been recognised with awards including ‘Best of Health Awards 2008’, ‘Westpac Waikato Business Excellence Awards 2007’ and ‘Best Health Awards 2006’.

¹ Various online health services directories exist, including [Healthpoint](#), [Healthpages](#) and [Health Connection](#).

² [Platform Trust](#) is a national network of 47 organisations that believe a modern mental health system requires strong community-based supports for people with mental illness and addictions.

In addition to access via the internet, Webhealth touch-screen information kiosks can be located in public places to enhance information available to communities. A number of kiosks are already located around the North Island. Placement of kiosks requires support from local communities, via DHBs, councils or community-minded businesses, as the installation and maintenance of these is around \$10-15,000 per kiosk.

Linkage Trust can also provide the Webhealth service via Mobile Apps that make Webhealth information available on mobile phones or tablets. The first is due to launch before the end of this year. There are currently no Webhealth kiosks funded in the South Island, but interest is being generated by recent activities.

“We applied through MSD’s earthquake fund to get some kiosks for Christchurch, but they said ‘no’ because they saw it as a ‘business-as-usual’ activity,” says Julie Noster, Webhealth representative for Canterbury.

While Julie explores earthquake support opportunities through CERA, the local PHO **Partnership Health Canterbury** has arranged for Webhealth to place a sample touch screen information kiosk at Earthquake Recovery Centres around Christchurch – in Avondale in September and Kaiapoi in October 2011. The free-standing kiosks help people in worst-affected suburbs connect and get information on health services.

“While people waited to be seen at the Centres, I was able to help people navigate through the options and services if needed,” says Julie.

“It also helped me to connect with other providers, assist earthquake support workers and CERA staff with finding services for their clients, and update the recovery information on our site.”

Canterbury’s Webhealth service is funded by **Canterbury DHB** to have a mental health focus, so local staff address the needs of mental health providers and community. Overall information on Webhealth is much broader, with potential to add a primary health or community focus to suit a region’s/funder’s key priorities.

Julie says one of the biggest challenges to keeping the information up-to-date is finding out when someone has gone out of business – especially in Christchurch, as so many providers have been displaced.

“After the earthquakes, I did lots of phoning around to check who was still operating, but I wasn’t the only one. The *Family Services Directory* people spent time updating and other major organisations were updating their own records too,” explains Julie, while acknowledging that it would have been smarter to share the workload through better co-ordination and collaboration by all those who maintain health-related databases.

Webhealth has a print functionality that allows anyone to print their own hard copy directory of selected health and social services on demand. As trends in health care continue to emphasise self-management, and individuals taking more responsibility for their own health³, the ability to create a customised, personal directory of relevant health providers will be an important tool for maintaining health.

³ [Trends in Service Design and New Models of Care: A Review](#), National Health Board, Aug 2010.

“People can do it themselves, or someone could do it for them – for example a social worker could compile a directory of services to help a family or a diabetes nurse could help someone to manage their condition more effectively,” says Julie Noster.

Webhealth’s print function has been acknowledged as assisting to create the *Blockes Book*, a post-earthquake handbook of services created by the **Canterbury Men’s Centre**, and Julie believes up to 30,000 were printed and distributed.

“Webhealth is also a potential source of information for GPs, who may not be aware of the many other health-related providers and support groups in their communities,” says Julie.⁴

Council directories, such as CINCH are available through libraries, but these are often out-of-date and hard to maintain. Webhealth is keen to work with others to reduce the duplication of time and effort in maintaining and updating information or to assist those requiring specialist directories.

“We worked with the PHO to create a directory for East Christchurch services after the earthquake to take stock of who was operating and to identify where the gaps were in services,” says Julie.

Julie sees organisations working in disability, mental health, with senior citizens, young people or people with cancer all trying to maintain up-to-date information on providers, and believes Webhealth could be a good starting point for many of them.

“I’ve met with some groups to discuss possibilities. Some are concerned about losing control. I know of one organisation that gets \$15,000 to develop a specialist directory – if they used our information, then perhaps they could negotiate with their funder to use that money for their speciality,” Julie suggests.

Some organisations won’t source their information from Webhealth because they currently have details on particular providers that are not yet on Webhealth, but a collaborative effort could lessen workloads down the track.

“We try to be responsive to community demand and priorities,” says Julie.

“In Canterbury recently, we worked with the Pacific manager at **Pegasus Health** to source all the information on Pacific providers, as the PHO saw a need to collate the information.

“Partnership Health Canterbury is a wonderful champion of what we do – they paid for the development of Webhealth’s print function because they saw the extra value it would bring,” says Julie.

“The PHO’s chief executive, Jane Cartwright, sees the future of health is in the community and technology will play a big role in that,” says Julie.

“It’s thanks to the support from the PHO that Canterbury is ahead when it comes to primary health information on Webhealth. They alert us to new health priorities and we are then able to connect at the right meetings and with the right people.”

Partnership Health chief executive, Jane Cartwright says Webhealth is a useful tool to help people see what services are available.

⁴ [See a review of Webhealth by a North Shore GP](#) in *NZ Doctor*, March 2011.

“One of our roles is to make sure practice nurses are up-to-date on what services may be good for their patients, so we encourage them to use Webhealth, as it’s better than notebook,” says Jane.

“It’s about building confidence in the information – they need to know it is up-to-date. Julie did great things to make sure the information was correct in September and February when lots of services had to move.

“Webhealth also links in with [HealthPathways](#), which is an integrated primary and secondary tool for health professionals who refer to specialist services,” explains Jane.

The PHO sees potential for Webhealth as a tool to help with co-ordination of services in fields such as youth work.

The PHO’s CE says the relationship with Webhealth is not unusual, as evidenced by various profiles in the PHO’s latest Annual Report.

“We look where we can have an influence and then work together,” says Jane, citing the fact that all parks in Christchurch are smokefree as an example of what can be achieved when NGOs unite.

“Here in Canterbury, our bread and butter is NGOs – it’s all about community development.

“We start with two points in mind. The first is that most things that have an impact on people’s health – the health system has no control over. And if we want people to get well, we need to make sure we link them to other things like health NGOs, churches and social services.”

Jane says historically Christchurch is different because it has a long tradition of NGO providers.

“For example district nursing has always been done by Nurse Maude, not the DHB,” she says.

When asked if there are any barriers to working with NGOs, Jane says “if you start off thinking about funding – that’s not going to work.

“There needs to be a willingness to find a way forward. In Canterbury, we always begin with a mythical patient called Agnes and look at what difference we can make to her.”

The PHO also makes a difference for Webhealth’s Julie Noster, who is based with other NGOs in the same offices as the PHO and is included in appropriate internal messages and meetings. This helps keep the lines of communication open and maximises opportunities to enhance awareness campaigns by adding relevant providers to Webhealth – such as when Partnership Health was working on smoking cessation.

Local Webhealth representatives like Julie are backed up by a support team who make a lot of the initial contacts, approve all new providers and notices, and check details regularly. Providers can self-register on the site, but the verification process is a vital step to check individual’s accreditation.

Linkage Trust also provides data capture from Webhealth to their funders. This includes most popular keyword or category searches, which provide insights into who is using the directory and what information they are seeking – helping to identify gaps in knowledge or services, or particular concerns in a local community.

A *Live Chat* and *Ask Webhealth* email address are available in the Waikato region, where people can seek health and social service information from Linkage Trust staff. This is not an online counselling service, but replicates the face-to-face services that Linkage Trust Service Navigators offer.

Internationally, online health information services are providing forums for peer-to-peer health advice and information through sites such as [Patients Like Me](#) – but nothing this comprehensive and interactive is yet available in New Zealand. There are sites such as [Treasures Community](#) where parents can learn from each other and share experiences, a bulletin board on the [Everybody website](#) that has some topic-based discussions and [Plunket's Facebook page](#), which welcomes conversation and information sharing between parents of under-fives.

Linkage Trust has also worked with **Health Navigator NZ**, which was started by a group of GPs, nurses and allied health professionals to assist their colleagues and patients. The project is led by the Health Navigator Charitable Trust in collaboration with a range of partner organisations including Heart Foundation, Asthma Respiratory NZ, SPARC, Mental Health Foundation, Arthritis NZ, Diabetes NZ, and local district health boards.

The key aim of Health Navigator NZ is to reduce duplication by linking all key health resources together through an online gateway or portal to simplify the process of finding educational resources, tools and quality-tested health information. This will support and enable individuals and their whānau to manage their health and long-term conditions more effectively in partnership with their healthcare team. The website also includes a portal to various health directories.

As Leticia Mincham of Linkage Trust says: “Our work is very much about collaboration and relationships.”

More information: www.webhealth.co.nz or www.partnershiphealth.org.nz or www.healthnavigator.org.nz

This is one of the 15 case studies profiled in *How NGOs Make a Difference to Health Care in the Community* – a 96-page report from the Health and Disability NGO Working Group, Jan 2012.

The case studies cover acute nursing services, health information services, virtual practices, youth one-stop-shops, mental health networks, community development approaches, cardiac rehab, Whānau Ora and Asiasiga models of care, and more – from North to South.

See www.ngo.health.govt.nz for more of the report.