

CHANGE PACKAGE

Streamlining telecommunication access for patients to your practice

Why should we improve our telephony system?

Effective phone call management is the first point of contact for the majority of patients wishing to access general practice. If your practice has a VoIP telephony system, you can ask your telephone company to provide reports on number of incoming calls, answered calls, dropped calls and voicemail messages, peak call times, and length of calls. Analysis of this data can help you understand if there is unmet demand, so that you can improve the efficiency of your telephony system and increase access to your practice services for patients.

What are the benefits?

- Improved patient access to clinic via phone call thus reducing number of walk-ins
- Ability to identify peak times leading to improved allocation of practice staff
- Reduced number of abandoned calls
- Better patient service and satisfaction

Who does what?

Staff	Role
Practice manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact telephony provider to request call data • Establish process for regular review of telephone data • Review telephone data • Allocate team members to cover peak call volume periods • Ensure that team members have the necessary equipment and space to handle calls • Consider patient survey for pre and post call monitoring impact
Business owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree and support the need to review call volume data day
PHOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer guidance with telephone company data request • Support with analysing telephone data

How will it affect staffing?

Once you identify peak call times, allocate a telephonist to a hot desk away from the front desk during this period. There the telephonist can take phone calls without the distraction of the other duties at reception. You might also need to change the hours of receptionists to have more cover during busy times.

How will the data be provided?

The telephony provider should be able to provide you with a report on request.

The report should contain the following data:

- Caller ID
- Date and time call received
- Call answered by whom (including voicemail)
- Calls transferred to whom
- Call abandoned/unanswered

The frequency of reporting will depend on the VOIP system you have, as there may be a cost associated with receiving reports.

Your PHO advisor can assist with this information and may be able to provide some extra analytical support.

Will we need additional resources?

This change package assumes your practice uses a VoIP telephony system.

You will also need a quiet hot-desking room for a telephonist to answer calls during peak times. Understanding your peak call times and dropped call numbers will help you identify if resources are sufficient to meet the demand of your patients.

How can we engage with our patients and address any concerns?

Keep patients updated about any changes you implement that will modify the way they usually interact with your practice. Initially some patients may be concerned. For this reason, it's important that they are kept informed and have a clear understanding of how to contact your practice and, if they leave a voicemail message, how long it will take for them to receive a reply. You can also invite patients to complete a patient satisfaction survey to understand the impact of the changes.

You may consider a patient survey to understand and track the patient experience pre and post call tracking implementation.

What else do we need to know?

- Some practices identified peak call times from 8 to 10am and from 3 to 5pm
- Calls coming in on the reception main line are typically handled more efficiently than those going to the voicemail boxes of other staff. To make the response to voicemail messages quicker and use staff time more efficiently, centralise and simplify your telephony system. It is recommended that you remove extra voicemail boxes managed by clinical staff and only leave a single generic voicemail box managed by receptionists, who notify relevant staff of voicemail messages by instant messaging, email or adding a call-back request into a GP or nurse's template
- Set a timeframe for staff to respond to voicemail messages
- Add a voicemail monitoring system to the manager's Outlook programme so that they can monitor timeliness of responses