

COVID-19 self-reporting platform eases pressure on pathology services and hospitals

The surge in COVID-19 cases over the 2021 holiday period meant that pathology testing centres across NSW were struggling to cope. People using Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) kits at home began presenting to hospitals in large numbers, concerned about their symptoms and test results. Emergency departments and ambulance services were overwhelmed by concerned patients who, with the right information and support, could have safely monitored and recovered at home.

The NSW Government responded to this by pivoting from a hospital-based response to a community health and self-care model of testing and care provision. To provide timely access to life-saving therapies for those at increased risk, the NSW Government needed a screening method and a process to implement mandatory reporting of RAT results.

To achieve this, the NSW Department of Customer Service (DCS) and NSW Health collaborated to rapidly deliver a digital solution that enabled people to:

- register a positive test
- screen themselves for risk
- access care providers through NSW Health where required.

DCS and NSW Health had already established a strong working relationship while collaborating on other challenges posed by COVID-19. They had worked together on the COVID Safe Check-In system and on announcing updates to public health orders via various communications channels. DCS and NSW Health leveraged their partnership to provide a digital solution that supported the mandatory reporting of RAT results.

This work was paired with an extensive communications strategy. Accessible messages were provided to the community through social media posts and radio announcements – most of which were translated into multiple languages to support people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

A steering committee helped deliver fast decisions on community needs and issues, with weekly forums to give updates on progress. Hybrid teams from DCS and NSW Health worked together daily to address these issues and discuss support measures.

This collaboration resulted in the establishment of a world-first RAT registration and screening program that has been replicated across many other Australian jurisdictions. Strong and consistent engagement with community clinical teams, and DCS's unwavering focus on the needs of the customer, ensured the solution was fit for purpose. The registration and screening process continues to connect people to potentially life-saving therapies early in their illness.

The reporting platform has recorded 1,848,722 COVID-19 positive RAT results registered through the Service NSW website and mobile app as of 12 September 2022. Customer satisfaction with this program was rated at 98.1 per cent. According to NSW Health, about 45 per cent of COVID-19 cases identified in NSW were reported by way of RAT self-registrations.

The rapid implementation of the screening program immediately relieved pressure on hospital emergency departments and ambulance services. It also provided reassurance and access to resources for worried patients. More than 30,000 calls and 2,000 emails regarding general enquiries and assistance were answered by Service NSW Contact Centre and middle office teams.

Over 100,000 patients have been proactively connected with Hospital in the Home and NSW COVID-19 community care teams to receive elevated levels of care. Around 24,000 eligible patients have connected with NSW Health care providers to access potentially lifesaving COVID-19 antiviral therapies. More than 394,000 cases were referred to NSW Health clinicians for further assessment based on risk factors identified through the secondary screening surveys. The release of the reporting platform also helped NSW to further open up after COVID-19 movement restrictions eased, helping to restart the economy.

The dedication and hard work demonstrated by this collaboration between NSW Health and DCS has potentially paved the way for future responses to healthcare challenges. Their work will be significant when dealing with challenges requiring cross-sector collaboration, strong public engagement, and timely connection to healthcare pathways.



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