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## The Murrumbidgee project—linking rural and remote Australia to specialist pain management services

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The remote and rural Murrumbidgee (Big Water) region of central south New South Wales, Australia expands across an area of 125,561 square kilometers, with a population of 242,561 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Compared to Australians in major cities, those who live remotely tend to have a shorter life expectancy, are more likely to suffer from chronic conditions such as back pain, arthritis, major injuries, and tend to make lifestyle choices detrimental to their health (Australia's Health, 2016; Rural and Remote Health Report, 2017). The Pain Management Network (NSW), in response to inequities of access to chronic pain services in rural and remote areas, launched the Murrumbidgee Project in 2016. Extensive collaboration ensued between pain specialists, general practitioners, specialist nurses, allied health professionals and consumers. The result was the development of an evidence-based model of care to include services provided via Telehealth (video conferencing) and outreach visits. The main goals of the Murrumbidgee Project are consumer empowerment and building the capacity of local clinicians through up skilling and development of a network of local skilled providers in chronic pain management. In summary, evaluations of the Telehealth service have indicated consumer and clinician satisfaction at 90% and 83% respectively. Consumers reported positive experiences, in particular the opportunity to access specialist pain services locally without increasing the financial burden and added stresses of travelling lengthy distances to a city hospital. While work continues to improve engagement with local indigenous communities, an expansion of Telehealth services has resulted from increasing service demand.

### Biography

Diana Taylor is a Clinical Nurse Specialist with 30 years of clinical experience in acute care and outpatient settings. For the past 7 years, she has been working in acute and chronic pain management at Nepean Hospital, NSW Australia (a tertiary teaching facility), where she has been actively involved in quality initiatives, teaching and leadership roles. Since 2016, she has been the Project Coordinator for the Murrumbidgee Project, developing and implementing chronic pain services in rural and remote New South Wales, Australia.

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