



Australian Government



Government  
of South Australia

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## **Mark Butler MP**

Minister for Health and Aged Care

## **Chris Picton MP**

South Australian Minister for Health and Wellbeing

### **JOINT MEDIA RELEASE**

# **Rural stroke patients receive life-saving treatment**

More than 1700 people in regional South Australia and the Northern Territory have used a groundbreaking virtual service “telestroke”, designed to provide potentially life-saving treatment for a stroke.

This critical service is being enabled through the Australian Commonwealth Government’s \$41.37 million Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) grant to the Australian Stroke Alliance as part of the Stroke Golden Hour project.

The SA Telestroke Service connects neurologists with a patient needing assessment at a regional hospital, supporting clinical staff on the ground to administer life-saving treatment immediately.

Since 2022, the service has also included a digital platform called Zeus, developed for the Australian Stroke Alliance, which brings together scans, consultation records and other patient information in a single database – cutting minutes off the time usually required for diagnosis and treatment.

Almost 60 per cent of regional patients presenting with stroke-like symptoms were diagnosed with a stroke.

In 2024, nearly 55 per cent of patients experiencing a clot-based stroke received thrombolysis – a clot-busting drug – within 60 minutes, below the national average of 95 minutes for rural patients, while unnecessary hospital to hospital transfers have reduced by 72 per cent.

Port Pirie mum Emily Sletten-Williams is extremely thankful for the service after she suddenly experienced a stroke in 2022, aged just 20.

Her partner raced her to Port Pirie Regional Health Service where a brain scan revealed a brain clot.

An SA Telestroke neurologist was able to look at Emily's data and then guided the Emergency Department staff to administer thrombolysis within 79 minutes of the stroke first occurring, partially dissolving the clot to start the process of returning blood flow to that part of her brain and preventing brain cell death and disability.

Emily was then flown to Royal Adelaide Hospital for thrombectomy, extracting the remaining clot from her brain.

This timely care not only saves lives, but also helps reduce the cost of treatment for both the patient and the health system.

Regional Australians are 17 per cent more likely to suffer a stroke than people who live in metropolitan areas.

The SA Telestroke Service – which receives \$229,000 in State Government funding - and Zeus gives fast-track critical neurological care across 61 regional SA hospitals, as well as Alice Springs Hospital and an after-hours service for Royal Darwin Hospital.

#### **Quotes attributable to Mark Butler**

*Telestroke is saving lives, you only have to look at Emily's experience.*

*We are living through a turbocharged period of discovery and the MRFF grant funded by the Albanese Government is accelerating this.*

*Our government is proud to fund innovative projects such as this that provide lifesaving care for stroke survivors.*

#### **Quotes attributable to Chris Picton**

*Every minute counts in the treatment of a stroke, so it's vital regional South Australians can be treated as soon as possible.*

*The SA Telestroke Service breaks down those barriers, helping those who experience a stroke begin their recovery as soon as they can.*

#### **Quotes attributable to Emily Sletten-Williams**

*I was just so startled and confused by the stroke because I was a healthy 20-year-old. I never thought it could happen to me; everyone thinks stroke happens to elderly people.*

*I wouldn't be leading a healthy and active life without the work of the SA Telestroke Service.*

*This program saved my life by giving me quick access to care in Port Pirie, which reduced the impact of the blood clot.*

**Quotes attributable to Rural Support Service, Acting Executive Director, Brett Webster**

*We are proud of the SA Telestroke Service and the collaboration between the Rural Support Service and the Australian Stroke Alliance.*

*Zeus has become a critically important piece of technology, helping reduce the amount of time patients have to wait to access treatment.*

*The statistics clearly show it is making an enormous difference to regional and rural patients, giving them the best chance possible to recover from a blood clot in the brain.*

**Quotes attributable to Australian Stroke Alliance Co-chair, Professor Stephen Davis AO**

*The SA Telestroke Service adopted innovative telehealth faster than any other state or territory.*

*Cases like Emily's are spectacular and provide a benchmark for the rest of the nation's health services wanting to improve stroke care offered to patients - well before they reach a city hospital.*

*It's essential that we treat rural and remote patients faster – they deserve urgent care as much as those living in metro areas.*

**MONDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2024**

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