

Free health advice
when you need it



ISSUE 9, December 2011

Healthline news

It's a real pleasure to be writing my first introduction to the Healthline newsletter. I started with Medibank Health Solutions New Zealand, the provider of the national Healthline service, in July, taking the place of Lesley Clarke, who has done an excellent job leading the team over the past four years.

Although Nelson-born (and an All Black supporter!), I have lived in Australia for the past 12 years. Most recently I have been based in Melbourne with Medibank Australia – first managing the Government Affairs Unit, and then in a broader role leading in a number of new and innovative areas.

For those not familiar with Medibank Australia, we offer a broad range of health services to governments and corporates, including, an afterhours service staffed by GPs providing telephone-based consultations (and soon these will be video enabled across the web), web-based health advice and health programmes,

Introduction

Davis Lemke
General Manager NZ
Medibank Health Solutions



telephone-based chronic disease management programmes, as well as a number of face-to-face health programmes.

Australia is currently facing the same pressures on its health system as here, namely an ageing population, increased prevalence of chronic disease, workforce pressures and rising costs. We need to look at smarter ways to deliver health care.

However, New Zealand is in a better position to deliver on these challenges because its system is based on strong building blocks, such as the GP-centric model of primary care, the capitated funding model and innovative services

such as Healthline.

Of course, there are also innovations happening in Australian health care, and I hope the good ideas can flow both ways.

I see my biggest challenge at Medibank as continuing to build on Healthline's success. We must keep looking for the smartest and most effective ways to deliver the service, and to reach those population groups that need us most.

The growing focus on eHealth is very exciting. We'll be watching closely and continuing to integrate eHealth into Medibank Health Solutions-run services.

Healthline and St John work together

Medibank Health Solutions NZ, the provider of Healthline, and St John have been partners for many years, giving advice and assistance when it is needed.

Healthline is often the first point of call for people needing health advice, while St John serves communities throughout New Zealand in a number of different ways. This includes providing emergency and non-emergency ambulance services, emergency care and first aid at public events, support telephone calls to those at home, transport to health appointments and first-aid training.

St John Marketing Services Manager Jan Wilkinson says



St John promotes Healthline wherever possible to help keep public awareness of the service high.

“We mention Healthline at public events and our advocacy talks. We include fridge magnets and information about Healthline in give-away packs that go to all the children participating in the Safe Kids programme. Healthline is promoted in

our first aid courses and is covered in most training workbooks, which are used by about 50,000 people each year.”

St John team leaders read and pass around the Healthline newsletter to ensure all staff are well informed about the service. They are then able to pass on this information to customers. The newsletters and other information are also on display at St John reception

areas and at its training venues.

Ms Wilkinson says together Healthline and St John provide a much-needed and valuable service.

“We’re delighted to do whatever we can to make New Zealanders aware that there are wonderful services in place to provide help and support when they need it.”

Access to healthline by vulnerable populations

Ian St George

Medibank Health Solutions New Zealand Medical Director



Healthline’s founders had a health equity vision – those who have potentially high health care needs, but who perceive barriers to seeking primary care, would be able to call the service. It would therefore be accessed more widely by Māori and ethnic minorities including Tagata Pasifika, the socioeconomically deprived and by elders. We might also add men – especially young men – and teenagers.

Healthline’s marketing strategy has always included Māori, and indeed 17.4 percent of callers identified as Māori in 2010, compared with 14.6 percent of the New Zealand population (2006 Census) and 11.8 percent of those attending general practitioners (2004 NatMedCa).

Furthermore, calls from Māori are more likely to be triaged for a current symptom, and less likely to be enquiries about nonclinical matters.

Given that over a third of calls to Healthline are about children, and given the age distribution and socioeconomic status of Māori, the number of calls to Healthline by Māori is not surprising, but the contrast with general practice attendance is striking.

We have examined the socioeconomic status of Healthline callers by coding their addresses according to the NZDep06 Deprivation index. The most deprived are in deciles 6 to 10 and the least in deciles 1 to 5. Figure 1 shows that Healthline is used more by those with higher deprivation than lower.

Cell phone calls to Healthline are free, and cell phones are now used by over 20 percent of callers (Figure 2).

Figure 1 also shows the deprivation deciles of cellphone callers, and shows that the cellphone is the preferred communication tool for the most deprived sections of the community, an important consideration in the provision of any telephone services targeting these groups.

The age distribution of callers closely matches the age distribution of those attending general practices after patient-initiated contacts.

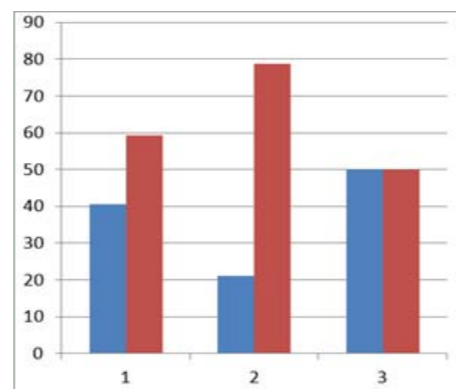


Figure 1: Percent in Deprivation deciles 1-5 (blue) and 6-10 (red)
1 = all Healthline callers
2 = cell phone callers
3 = New Zealand population

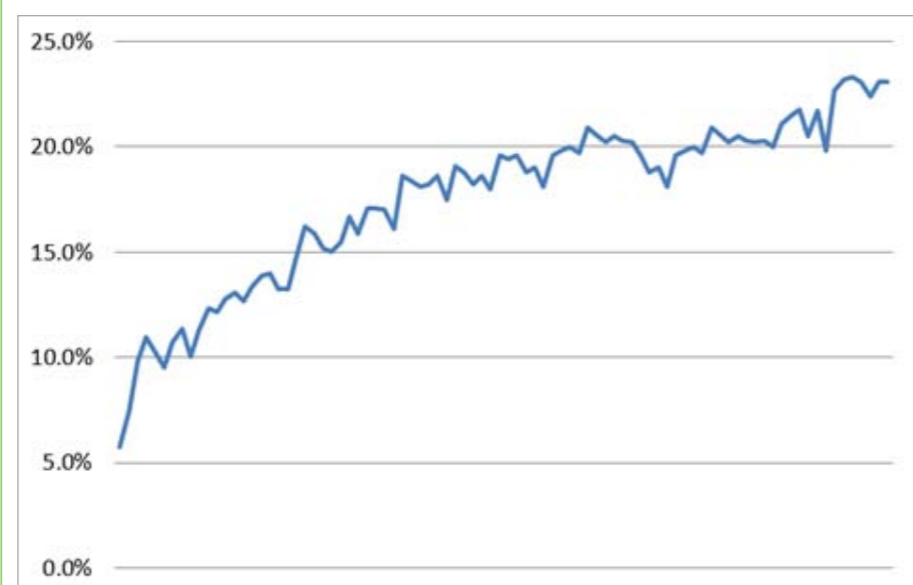


Figure 2: Cell phone callers as percent of all calls May 2005 to present

Healthline saved my husband’s life, says Donna

Donna MacDonald of Kawakawa Bay will never forget the evening her husband John became gravely ill.

“He was an awful colour, he couldn’t stop vomiting and was complaining of pain in his arm and jaw.”

John, 62, had come home from work early, feeling unwell, and despite medical treatment, was getting steadily worse. By evening Donna was getting very worried.

“I just knew something was really wrong. I rang a friend who gave me the number for Healthline.”

Donna spoke to Healthline nurse Jenny Cox, who, after assessing John’s condition, recommended calling an ambulance.

John was admitted to hospital and tests revealed he’d suffered a heart attack – but there was worse to come, says Donna.

“They also discovered he had three blocked arteries and could literally have dropped dead at any moment.”



Healthline nurse Jenny Cox

John has since had life-saving bypass surgery; something Donna says wouldn’t have happened if it hadn’t been for Healthline.

“Healthline saved my husband’s life. Simple as that, and I’ll always be incredibly grateful.”

Taking the pulse

Statistics from Healthline’s most recent survey of caller trends and volumes, for the July to September 2011 quarter, show:

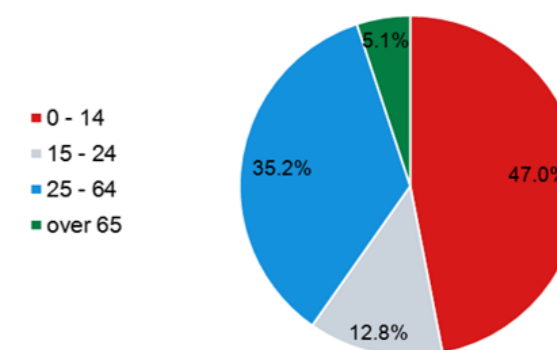
- Call volumes increased this quarter compared to the previous quarter. 112,051 calls were received compared with 97,781 last quarter
- Average number of calls a day – 1218.
- 79.6 percent of callers required triage of symptoms.
- 8.2 percent were provided with health education and information.
- 5.7 percent sought provider referral information.
- 67.4 percent of calls were received outside standard business hours.
- Mondays, Saturdays and Sundays were the busiest days.
- The highest number of calls received concerned coughing, vomiting, and colds in children and abdominal pain or chest pain in adults.
- Māori utilisation of the service is high with 19% of callers identifying themselves as Māori compared to representation in the general population of 14%.
- Healthline has been particularly busy this quarter with

people calling about symptoms relating to influenza-like illness and also with rashes, as measles continues to be prevalent in the community.

- Some DHBs have a higher usage than the national average. These include Auckland, Capital & Coast, MidCentral, Tairāwhiti, Taranaki and Wairarapa.

Healthline patient/caller age demographics

(n = 95,667)



Healthline kept busy with influenza, measles and meningitis

Healthline has experienced a late seasonal busy period responding to influenza-related calls and also callers concerned about measles and meningitis.

Public health updates help us keep up-to-date with the status of measles outbreaks, ensuring we give callers accurate and useful information about the outbreak in their area.

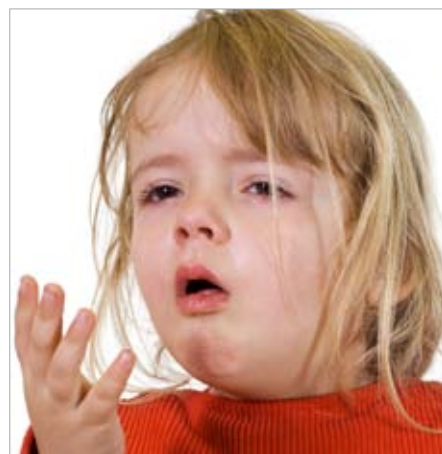
Healthline staff have health advice information available to them via the health topic library. Callers with symptoms are triaged and advised to contact their GP so a notification can be made to the Medical Officer of Health.

Healthline continues to provide the Ministry of Health with influenza-like illness (ILI) data to assist with surveillance.

Data collected are daily counts of all

symptomatic calls made to Healthline and those triaged for ILI. About 80 percent of all calls to Healthline are symptomatic (other calls not part of this analysis include queries for information etc).

For the week ending 2 October 2011, 18.5 percent of all calls to Healthline were



ILI-related (18.3 percent in the previous week). This is higher than the percentage of ILI-related calls at the same time last year (16.9 percent).

Calls to Healthline for information about measles and meningitis are three times higher than the same period in 2010.

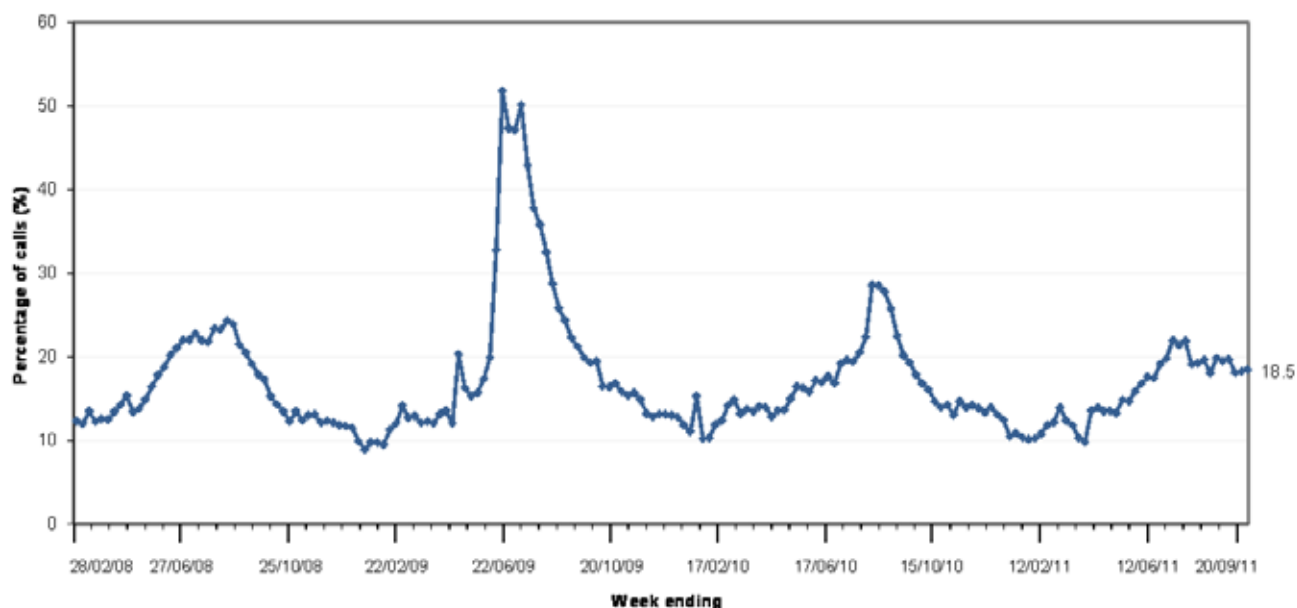
Need some free resources?



Information pamphlets on the Healthline service are available in six languages (English, Māori, Samoan, Tongan, Korean and Chinese).

These, along with an English language poster and fridge magnets, can be ordered by sending an email to healthline@gslnetwork.co.nz.

**Percentage of all symptomatic Healthline calls that were ILI calls, by week
Weeks ending 28 February 2008 - 2 October 2011**



About Healthline

Healthline is the national telephone health advice and triage service provided for the Ministry of Health by Medibank Health Solutions in association with St John.

It is staffed by experienced registered nurses who provide health information and recommend appropriate care for callers experiencing symptoms.

The nurses use their clinical experience, along with a sophisticated decision

support system, to advise the most appropriate level of care for callers.

The nurses will assess symptoms and, through a process of elimination, make a recommendation for the best course of action. The nurse will also advise where to seek further help if necessary, and a timeframe within which to do so.

The nurses have access to an extensive database of health providers to refer callers to. They can also assist the caller to contact the nearest GP's after-hours service; guide



the caller to the nearest emergency department; provide details of local health services, late-night pharmacies and out-of-hours dental surgeries.

Healthline nurses are also able to offer general health information and advice to callers.

Interpreter services are available if required.