

Cite as: Silvia Pfeiffer, Gladys Kadzutu-Maseko, Telehealth for a highly urbanised country , Innovation & Impact, 2021
 URL: iai.digital/2021/coviu

Telehealth for a highly urbanised country

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Abstract: Coviu is an Australian based telehealth software company that has enabled over 3 million video consultations in 2020 following the introduction of universal Medicare telehealth items. Coviu, a spin out of the CSIRO, offers its software as a service platform not only for practitioners but also is used as the government’s Healthdirect Video Call platform.

Keywords: Coviu, telehealth, artificial intelligence, computer vision.

1. The success story

Coviu Global Pty Ltd is a browser-based video telehealth software, sold as a subscription to healthcare businesses that want to offer video telehealth services to their patients or clients. Silvia Pfeiffer, CEO and Co-founder of Coviu articulates that Coviu is unique, as it is *“purpose built for the healthcare industry, unlike Zoom or Microsoft Teams that were built for the corporate industry”*. Pfeiffer insists that the *“biggest differentiator for Coviu is the introduction of clinical tools during telehealth consultations that the health care industry would not benefit from across other video conferencing platform”*.

2. How did we start?

Coviu was created and launched in 2015, by a team of software engineers and scientists, *“we pride ourselves in having spun out of CSIRO, as a model of how CSIRO can spin out companies in the technology space”* says, Pfeiffer, *“other companies are doing that now”*.

Coviu’s founding premise was to facilitate tele-practice sessions between speech therapists from the Royal Far West School and children in rural and remote schools. The CSIRO project developed a platform that allowed superior practitioner-client interaction than typical video conferencing platforms already available on the market, through the incorporation of stimulus material and whiteboards. By 2018, use of the platform extended to other allied health professionals such as physiotherapy and mental health.

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Pfeiffer identified that whilst Australia is a highly urbanised country where 90% of Australians live in urban areas, the challenge remained in delivering quality healthcare to 10% of Australians who live in rural and remote areas. Since 70% of healthcare expenditure in Australia is publicly funded, prior to the COVID pandemic, support of Telehealth by Medicare was limited to;

1. Remote GPs servicing patients that live at least 15km away;
2. The “dual care” model which involves a rural patient sitting with their GP for a video call with an urban-located specialist; and
3. “Better access” care which supported patients in rural and remote areas to see psychologists via video telehealth.

This meant that all other telehealth offerings left patients out-of-pocket. The knowledge of this gap in equitable and accessible quality clinical care precipitated a shift in the target market. Pfeiffer believed that telehealth was the beginning of the digital transformation of healthcare and that CoviU as a digital technology solution, could play a role in improving the efficiency and equality of the Australian healthcare system.

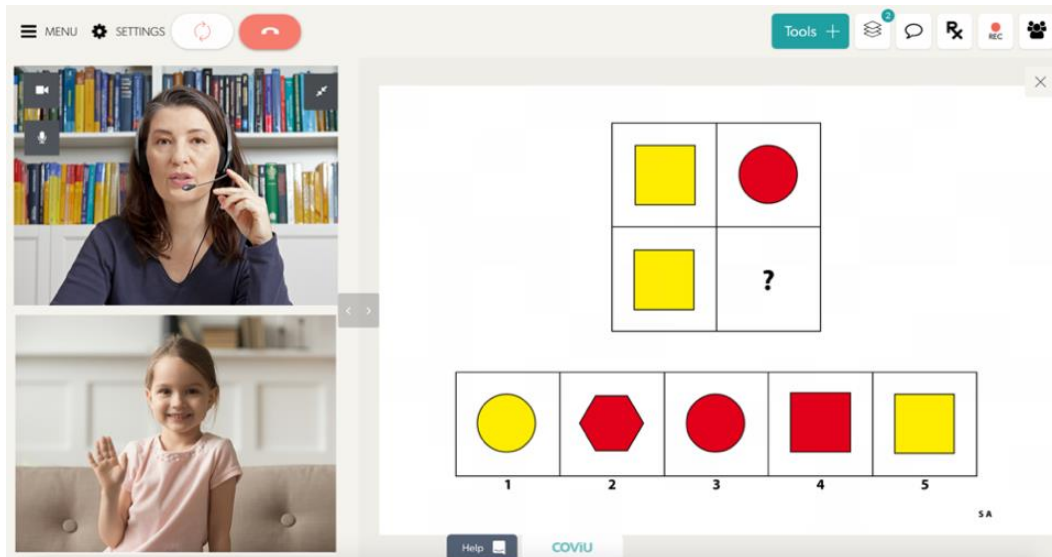


Figure 1. CoviU has developed clinical tools for healthcare providers such as speech pathologists and psychologists enriching clinical decision-making during a video consultation. Commercial customers can purchase these through CoviU’s addOn marketplace to support research at scale.

3. Our Technology

CoviU’s pioneering software platform supports integrated clinical tools which aid in performing standardised assessments during patient-clinician telehealth consultations. CoviU has worked with Australian research institutes to clinically validate standardised assessments undertaken via telehealth, eliminating previous concerns of validity and accuracy.

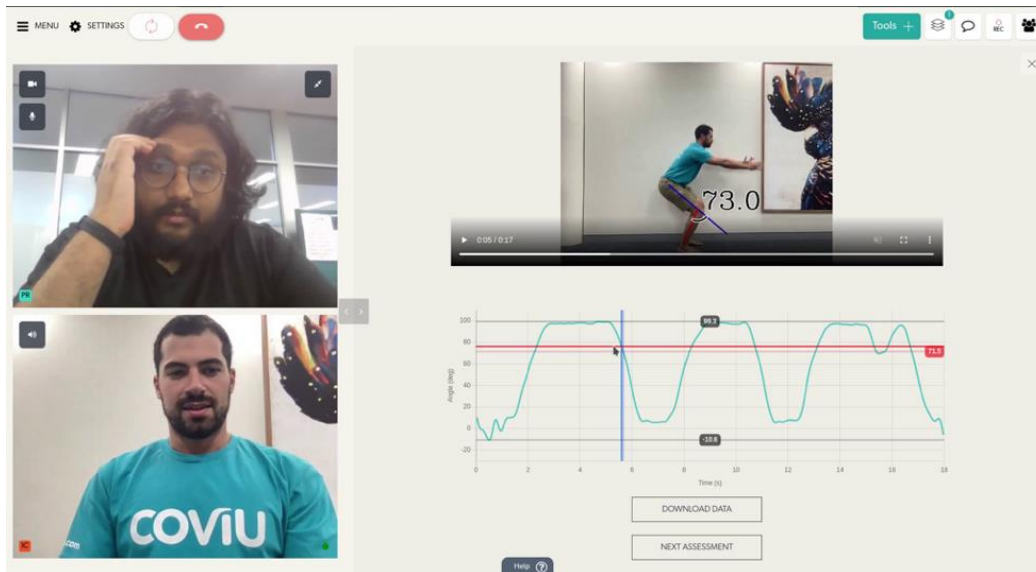


Figure 2. Similarly, physical and occupational therapists can assess degree of limb functionality using a computer vision and machine learning based algorithm that calculates range-of-motion via web camera video.

4. The journey so far

In 2018, Coviu received \$1m in investment from Main Sequence Ventures. By 2019, Coviu signed a contract with Healthdirect to deliver a white labelled solution for Healthdirect video telehealth across Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory in addition to certain Public Health Network federal health department projects.

The COVID pandemic was the making of Coviu’s success. In March 2020, as telehealth Medicare items were made available nationally, and patients were encouraged to take their consultations from home, many providers picked up telehealth. Coviu’s usage grew from 400 consultations a day to 25,000 consultations with more than 70,000 Australian clinicians utilizing the platform. More than 3 million consultations were delivered by a wide range of health practitioners over the Coviu platform. Due to it’s high uptake, by the end of 2020, Coviu had raised \$6m of investment by Main Sequence Ventures, Equity Venture Partners, Giant Leap and Medical Angels and is now scaling its platform into the US.

5. Look into the future

Coviu’s current focus is to ensure ease of use for clinicians to deliver high quality video consultations to patients, *“it has to be simple for patients and we want to make sure that every clinician feels empowered to use telehealth”*, says Pfeiffer. *Pfeiffer concludes that she is hopeful for the future, Coviu is looking abroad for further growth and “want to apply this in Australia and US, take it broader and expand in other markets internationally.”*

Expanding the focus to enhancing clinician-to-clinician interactions for training purposes, team care arrangements and case conferences is the next logical step for Coviu. *“We have always focused on giving clinicians the best telehealth experience possible, says Pfeiffer, “clinicians are*

a rare resource and their time is valuable, so if we want them involved with virtual care, it has to be as good as possible, providing them with the relevant clinical tools.”

References

Coviu’s publications can be found at <https://www.coviu.com/en-au/clinicalevidence>

The company



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Investment Rounds (collected in 18.08.21)

| Seed | 19.04.18 | Main Sequence | \$1, 000,000

| Convertible Note | 19.01.2020 | MedAngels | \$800,000

| 2020 | Equity Venture Partners, Main Sequence Ventures, Giant Leap and Medical Angels | \$6,000,000

Main facts (collected in May 2021)

The Company spun out of the CSIRO in May 2018.

The first product was delivered in 2015 as a project within the CSIRO.

The company currently employs 42 staff.

The next milestone is US expansion.

Silvia Pfeiffer is the CEO of CoviU. She has more than 15 years experience with Web video technology and has worked for Accenture, Google, Mozilla, NICTA and CSIRO. CoviU is her second startup. She co-edited standards that made video a prime citizen of the Web and underpin CoviU. Silvia has a PhD in computer science, a masters in business management, has published two books on HTML5 video, and one on video consultations for healthcare businesses.



Gladys Kadzutu-Maseko is a charismatic Aged Care leader. Her field of expertise spreads over Nursing, Administration, Management, Clinical Governance, Heading Clinical Operations, and Client Services. She is actively involved in ensuring compliance in the industry. She believes in effective leadership development and ensuring the Managers in Aged Care and their teams provide exceptional care and lifestyle services, resulting in consumer satisfaction and outstanding performance. Gladys pioneered the Family Model of Care at Twilight Aged Care’s Hunters Hill Village, in 2018. Following its success in shifting culture from Task focused to Resident Focused or Person centred care, the Model was adopted by the organization and rolled out across other Twilight facilities. Gladys is also a Research Student and Published Author, whose passion in Aged Care led her into writing her first book, ‘The Journey of an Aching Heart Through a New Leaf.’

