

A Store-and-Forward Teledermatology Pilot Service (Townsville)

Celine Lee¹, Dr Rebecca Evans¹, Dr Aaron Boyce²

1 James Cook University, 2 Townsville University Hospital
Correspondence address: cl17jj@outlook.com



8

TropiQ
Townsville
Tropical Intelligence
& Health Precinct

BACKGROUND

- Australia has a shortage of dermatologists. 94% practice in metropolitan areas. Decreased access to specialist dermatology services in regional, rural and remote areas, resulting in poorer outcomes for patients with dermatological conditions.¹
- The shortage of dermatologists in rural and regional Australia is acutely felt in north Queensland where the population experiences a leading burden of skin cancer and tropical dermatoses.
- Store-and-forward teledermatology (SAFT) is a potential solution to improve the accessibility of dermatology specialist care in rural communities.
- eConsult (a SAFT service) was piloted for the broader Townsville community in 2022.

OBJECTIVE

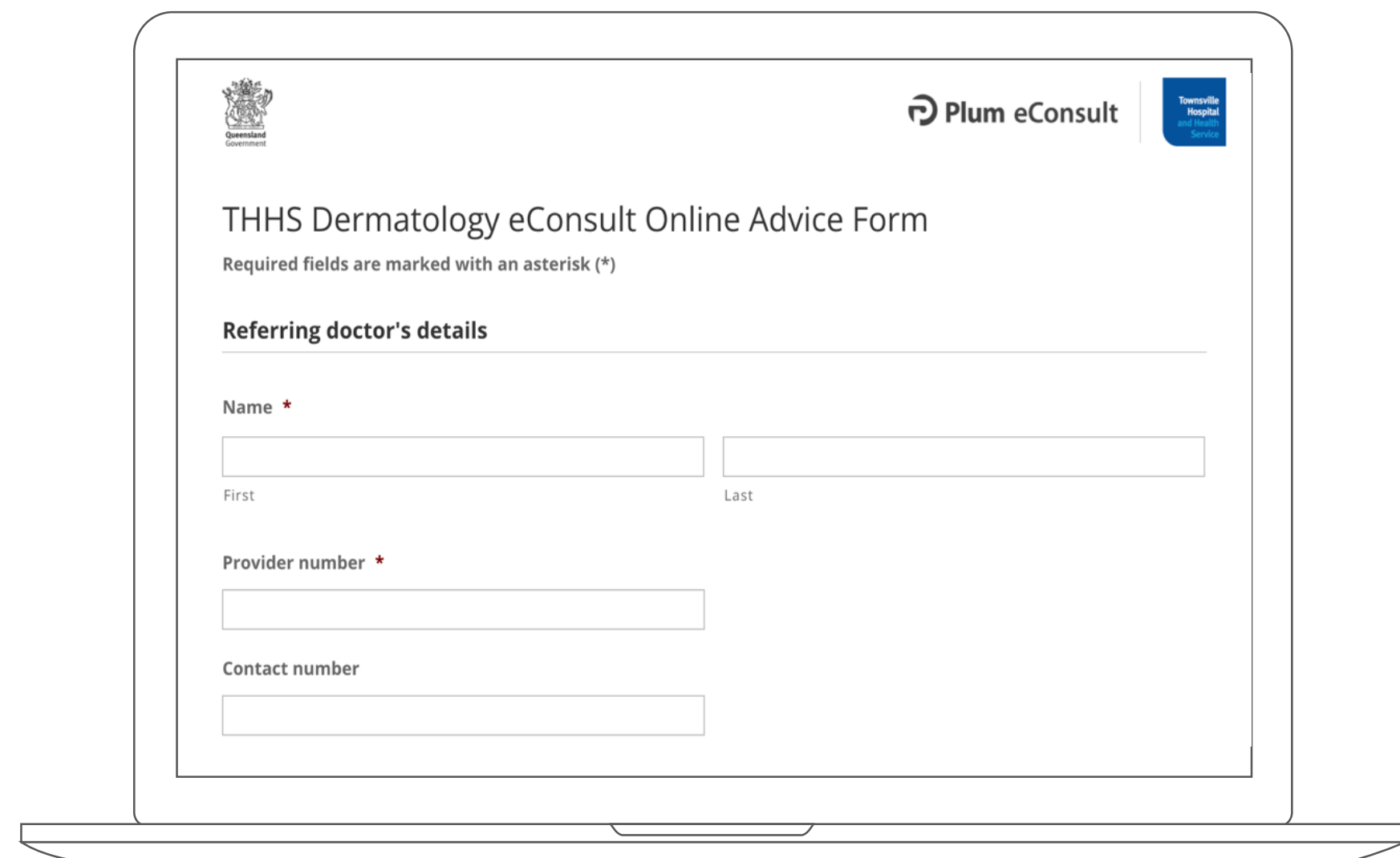
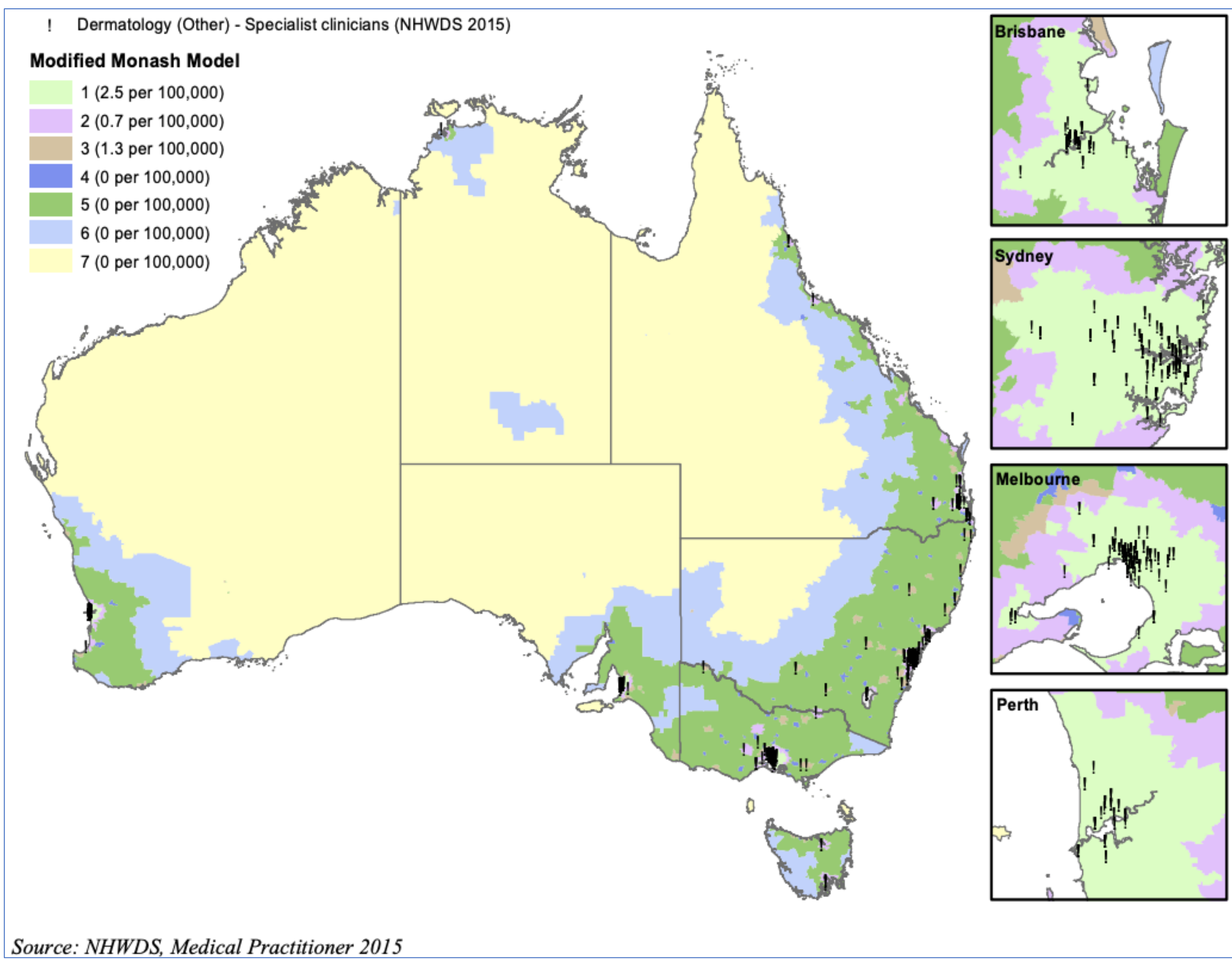
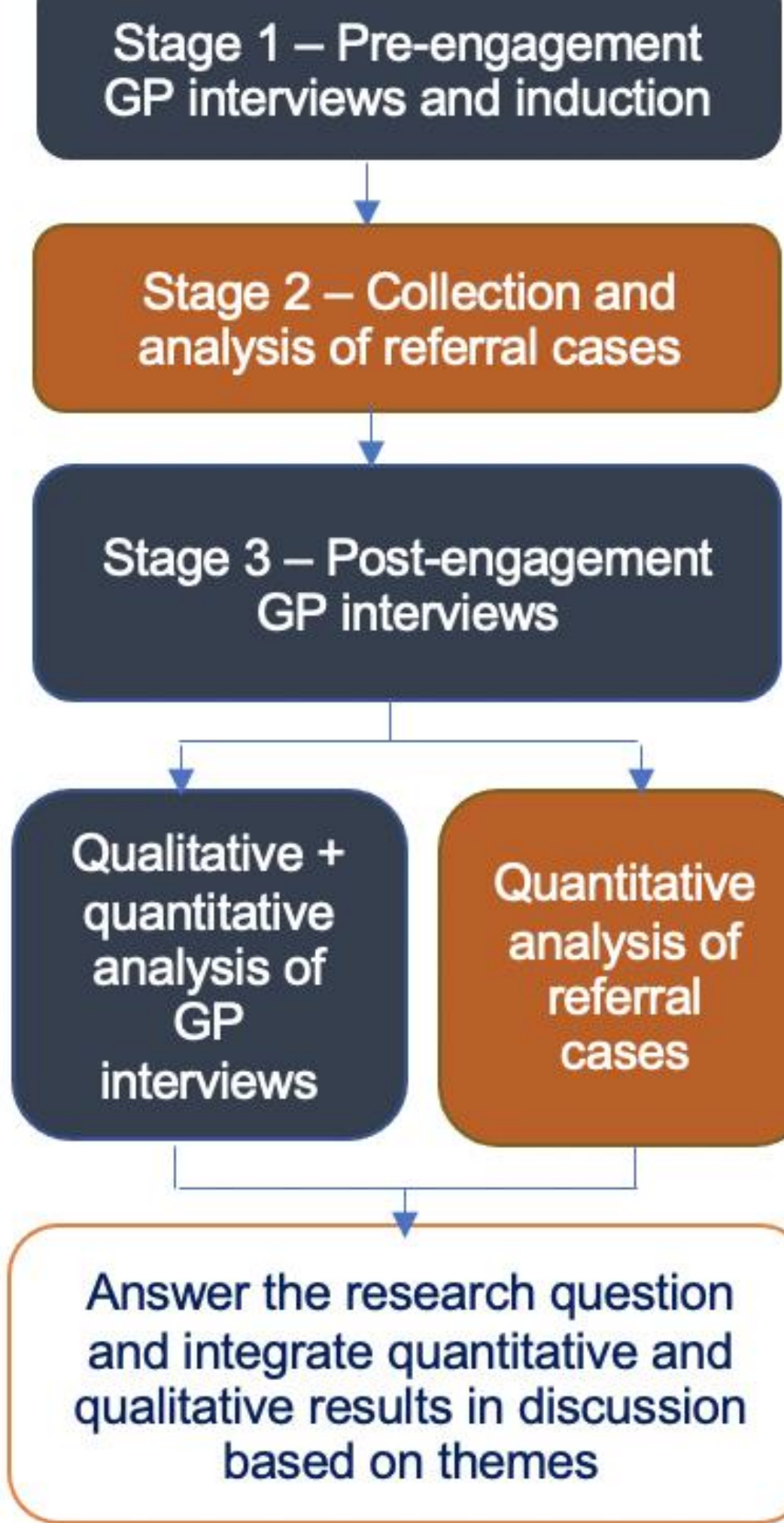
To evaluate **clinician perspectives** and **use** of eConsult within the Townsville Hospital and Health Service catchment over the pilot period (up to nine months).

METHODS

Prospective mixed methods

Qualitative: Abductive analysis of pre and post intervention interview questions with GPs

Quantitative: Descriptive statistics of eConsult referral characteristics and Likert scale questions (GP interviews)



RESULTS

Table 1: Summary of clinician characteristics

	Number (%)	
<u>Gender</u>		
Female	15	63
Male	9	38
<u>Clinician position</u>		
GP registrar	3	13
VR GP	19	79
non-VR GP	1	4
Community-based clinician	1	4
<u>Practice Software Used</u>		
Best practice	16	67
Medical Director	7	29
Other	1	4
Total	24	

Pre-engagement interview: 24 Clinicians participated

- Majority believed local teledermatology service was useful
- Valued extra support from dermatologist for:
 - Diagnosis, management
 - Paediatric cases
 - Eczema
 - Acne
 - Inflammatory and autoimmune conditions
 - Specialist prescriptions

Figure 2: Clinician perspectives on reasons for submitting cases on the eConsult 1= never, 2 = occasionally, 3 = a moderate amount, 4 = a great deal

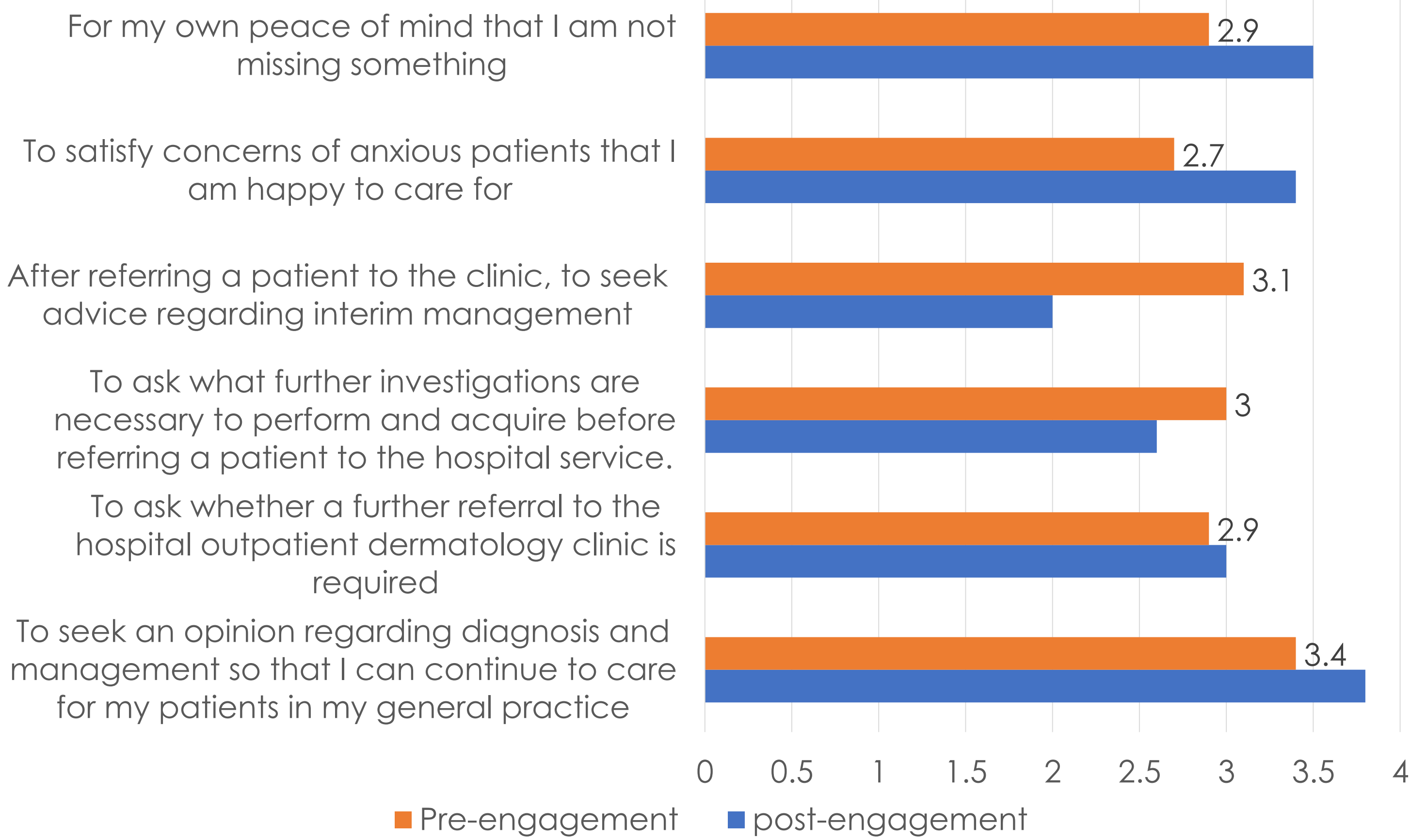
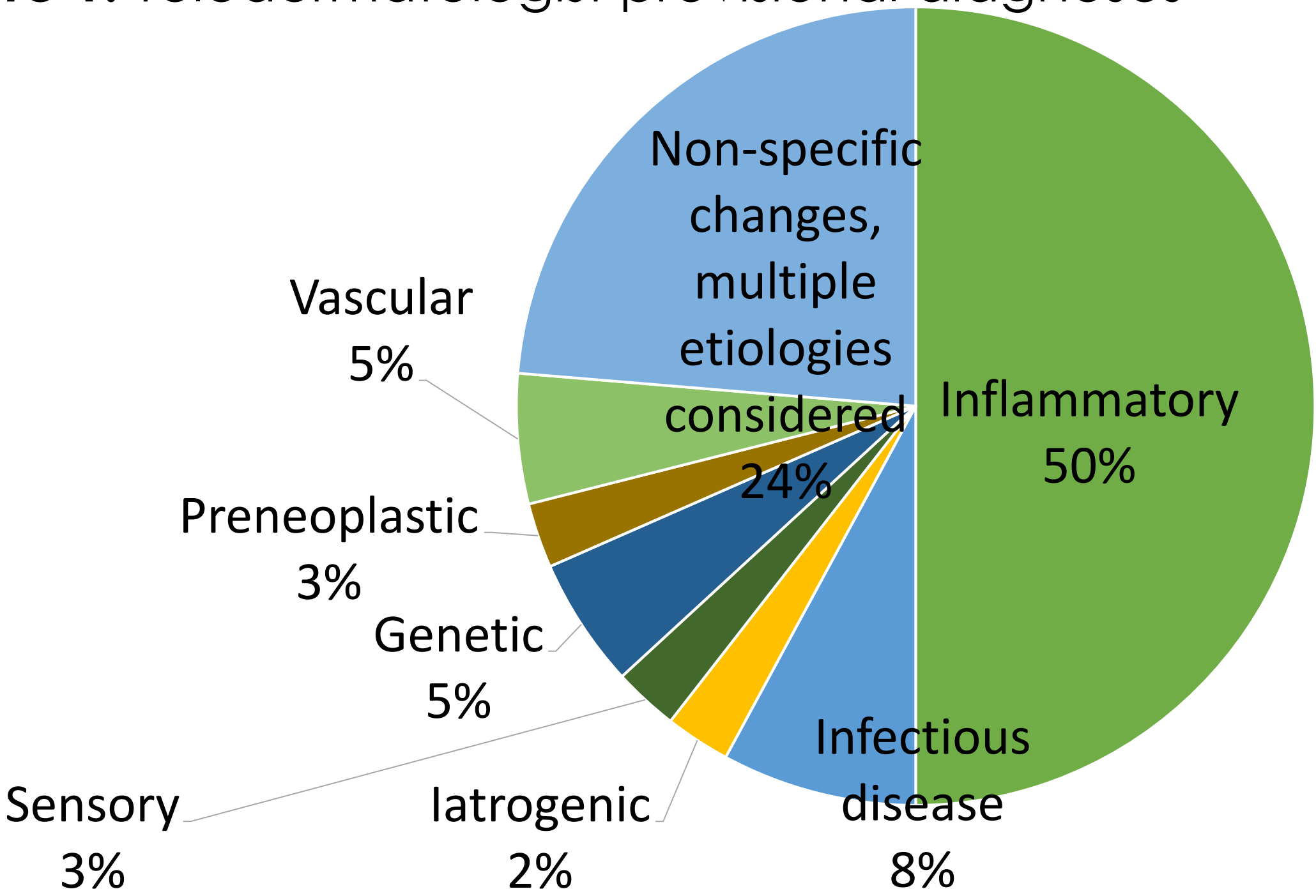


Figure 1: Teledermatologist provisional diagnoses



38 eConsult referrals were made

- 26% cases were **paediatric**
- Average **turnaround time** for dermatologist advice: **8 days** (including non-business days).
- Teledermatologist requested **6 (16%)** eConsult patients to be seen in outpatient **F2F** clinic
- 3 (8%)** patients referred to outpatients by GP within 6 month after their eConsult referral

Post-engagement interview: 17 participated, 10 made referrals, 7 did not

Clinicians who used the service believed...

- There were good response times
- There was utility of eConsult for non-urgent cases
- Believed it was easy to use, though not interoperable
- It improved knowledge and confidence

Suggestions

- Integration with Smart Referrals, reducing time to write referrals
- Collaborative group discussions

CONCLUSION

- Clinicians rated eConsult 9.6 out of 10 for the likelihood of recommendation to a colleague
- GPs generally have positive perceptions, expectations met
- This service can be helpful for the diagnosis and management of non-urgent cases - any age, skin condition
- Continue to work on barriers for teledermatology: further economic studies, and continue to engage with GPs