



2009 TELSTRA BUSINESS AWARDS



Victorian business, The COACH Program, has developed an innovative program to improve the lives of people with chronic illnesses and taken top honours in the 2009 Telstra Business Awards.

The COACH Program, devised by Dr Margarite Vale, is a telephone delivered coaching program to help people with serious illnesses such as coronary heart disease and diabetes better manage their health and lifestyles.

The business foundation spans back to 1995 when Dr Vale was working as a dietitian at St Vincent's Hospital and identified a treatment gap for patients suffering from chronic illness – such as coronary heart disease and diabetes.

“As a dietitian in a public hospital I had absolutely no idea how effective my work was as there was no opportunity to follow up patients to see whether they had taken on any health advice,” Dr Vale said.

“We never saw the patients again, unless they were re-admitted with further cardiovascular disease. Yet there is evidence that only a minority of people are achieving target levels for risk factors such as LDL-cholesterol and blood pressure.

“The COACH Program was developed as a method to bridge this treatment gap. It progressed from an idea, to undergoing rigorous testing with two randomised controlled trials – the gold standard method of testing the effectiveness of an intervention; and then from research to roll-out.

“The COACH Program business was developed as a means of rolling out the program to benefit many people with chronic disease.”

As the program is based on evidence of how patients have responded in controlled trials, its proven credibility means it can be rolled out in public and private health systems around Australia and overseas.

The win by The Coach Program marks the first time in the 17-year history of the prestigious awards that a ‘micro-business’ – a business with five or fewer staff – has taken out the top prize.

The COACH Program was also named the national winner of the *businessowner* Micro-Business Award. Other winners at the Telstra Business Awards included Edible Blooms from South Australia, Point Project Management from the ACT, Vaxine from SA and R Radford & Son from Victoria.

Telstra CEO David Thodey said The COACH Program was a great example of an innovative small business playing a fundamental role in Australian society.

“Businesses like The COACH Program, and the other state and national finalists, capture the powerful entrepreneurial spirit in this country and celebrate the

people who form the very foundation of our economy,” Mr Thodey said.

“They are the reason why Telstra continues to support these awards year in and year out.

“These awards are about recognising and rewarding the talent and determination of small businesses and helping them achieve even greater success.”

Telstra Business Group Managing Director and Telstra Business Awards Ambassador, Deena Shiff, said The COACH Program stood out because it had translated the best of clinical research into a real world health delivery environment, with a viable business model and strong institutional demand.

“The research that has gone into the program is being constantly updated, so patients receiving ‘coaching’ can be confident they are getting advice that is medically proven,” Ms Shiff said.

“Although it is a very small business it has the potential to grow and improve the health and well-being of many thousands of people world-wide with chronic disease,” Ms Shiff said.

Dr Vale said the program gives patients important management skills and the motivation to take control of their own health.



“With this program, patients are trained to be the ‘driver’ of the process of achieving and maintaining the target levels for their coronary risk factors while working in association with their usual doctors.

“It means they have a credible, knowledgeable source of information to go to for advice, support, clarification or to just act as

a confidential sounding board.

“The coach can offer practical help with issues such as how to change your diet, modify your cooking style and understand food labels. They can also help you plan ways to exercise to suit your lifestyle, discuss your medication and, if necessary, suggest alternatives to discuss with your doctor.

“It has been a rewarding challenge

to translate a program developed from research into a commercial product over the years.”

Dr Vale acknowledges that “winning the national Telstra Business Award provides us with the opportunity to take The COACH Program to another level and expand the program onto the global stage.”