



JURISDICTIONAL SCAN

VIRTUAL HEALTHCARE IN CANADA

Written by:

Norma Chinho, Knowledge Broker

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The AGE-WELL National Innovation Hub APPTA welcomes comments about this report and would like to know how we can better meet your information needs. If you have any questions about the work APPTA conducts, please contact us.

EMAIL: info@appta.ca

DISCLAIMER

This publication is intended to provide an overview of the virtual healthcare landscape in Canada and is based on publicly available information available as of the date of publication or as otherwise noted. None of the information in this document should be construed as legal, accounting, or other professional advice.

The authors have made every effort to ensure the information included in this document is correct and up-to-date, however, none of the information included is intended to substitute more recent information available through government or program-specific resources. The authors make no other representations or warranties, whether expressed or implied, with respect to the information in this document, and are not liable for any loss or damage arising directly or indirectly from the use of, or any action taken on the reliance on, any information appearing in this publication or in any publication by a third party that is referenced or linked to this publication.

A Jurisdictional Scan

Navigating the Virtual Healthcare Landscape in Canada:

Introduction

Virtual healthcare has become increasingly important in recent years, particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic causing many healthcare providers to shift to remote consultations. In Canada, virtual care providers vary by province and territory, with some offering more comprehensive services than others. For example, Ontario has a program called Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN), which provides telemedicine services to over 1,600 locations across the province.¹ British Columbia², Quebec³, and Yukon⁴ also offer similar telemedicine programs, while other provinces and territories have smaller-scale virtual care initiatives. However, the availability and accessibility of virtual care services varies depending on factors such as internet connectivity and rural/remote location. Overall, primary physicians in Canada expressed greater satisfaction using virtual healthcare than their counterparts according to the 2022 Commonwealth Fund (CMWF) International Health Policy Survey of Primary Care Physicians⁵.

Virtual care encompasses various forms of remote healthcare delivery, including telemedicine, remote monitoring, and digital health tools.

While telemedicine is a form of virtual care, it refers to the use of technology to provide remote medical care and consultation, such as videoconferencing, phone calls, or messaging.⁶ Virtual care is a broader term that encompasses various forms of remote healthcare delivery, including telemedicine, remote monitoring, and digital health tools⁷. So, while telemedicine is a specific type of virtual care that involves direct communication between healthcare providers and patients, virtual care can also include other

¹ Ontario Telemedicine Network <https://otn.ca>

² BC Virtual Visit <http://www.phsa.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/office-of-virtual-health/bc-virtual-visit>

³ <https://carnetsante.gouv.qc.ca/portail>

⁴ Telehealth <https://yukonhospitals.ca/en/health-professionals/telehealth>

⁵ <https://www.cihi.ca/sites/default/files/document/expansion-of-virtual-care-in-canada-report-en.pdf>

⁶ Haleem A, Javaid M, Singh RP, Suman R. Telemedicine for healthcare: Capabilities, features, barriers, and applications. *Sens Int.* 2021;2:100117. doi: 10.1016/j.sintl.2021.100117. Epub 2021 Jul 24. PMID: 34806053; PMCID: PMC8590973.

⁷ <https://tigerconnect.com/about/faqs/what-is-virtual-healthcare/>

types of digital healthcare services that do not necessarily involve direct interaction with healthcare providers.

In this jurisdictional scan, we will focus on the different virtual healthcare platforms available across the provinces and territories in Canada. After an examination of the virtual healthcare landscape in Canada, we have scanned and analyzed the available platforms, categorizing them based on our findings into primary care/point of entry services, medication management services, mental health services, and electronic medical records (EMR).

Virtual healthcare visit requirements

To have a successful virtual healthcare visit, one typically needs⁸:

1. **Internet Connection:** A stable and reliable internet connection is essential for a virtual healthcare visit. High-speed internet is preferred for a smooth video/audio experience.
2. **Computer or mobile device:** You can use a computer or mobile device such as a smartphone or tablet with a camera, microphone, and speaker to attend the virtual visit.
3. **Video conferencing software:** Virtual healthcare visits are conducted through video conferencing software such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet. Your healthcare provider will typically send you a link to the video conference call. Providers also advise users to download apps that may be used for appointments.
4. **Personal health information:** You may need to provide your personal health information and medical history to the healthcare provider during the virtual visit.
5. **Health insurance information:** You may also need to provide your health insurance information to the healthcare provider if your visit is covered by insurance.

For would-be users it is ideal to confirm the requirements for a virtual healthcare visit with the providers of the province or territory one lives in ahead of time to ensure a successful and productive visit.

⁸ What do I need for a BC Virtual Visit? <http://www.phsa.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/office-of-virtual-health/bc-virtual-visit>

Different virtual healthcare platforms across jurisdictions

Primary Care/Point of Entry Services

Primary care services are the first point of contact for individuals seeking medical care⁹. These services are usually provided by general practitioners, family physicians, or nurse practitioners. The aim of primary care is to provide comprehensive and continuous medical care, including preventive, curative, and rehabilitative services. Primary care services include routine check-ups, management of chronic conditions, immunizations, screening tests, and counseling on lifestyle changes, among other services. The goal of primary care is to promote overall health and well-being, and to address any health concerns that may arise. It is an essential component of the healthcare system and serves as a foundation for a person's long-term health.

In terms of virtual primary health care in Canada, there are different platforms operating across jurisdictions such as Maple, WELL Health Virtual Clinics, Telus, GoeVisit and Cover Health. These different platforms allow access to medical providers for referrals, requisitions, prescription renewals, assessment of medical issues such as hypertension, gastrointestinal issues, cold and flu symptoms, sore throat, COVID screening, etc. The table below provides an overview of these platforms in terms of services provided, which jurisdictions they operate in, coverage, security measures, and cost.

⁹ What is Primary Care? <https://www.news-medical.net/health/What-is-Primary-Care.aspx>

Table 1: Primary Care, Point of Entry Services

Primary Care, Point of Entry Services						
Platform	Description	Coverage	Jurisdiction	Security	Cost (if not covered)	Link
Tia Health*	Access to medical providers for referrals, requisitions, prescription renewals, assessment of medical issues such as cold and flu symptoms, sore throat, COVID screening, etc.	100%	Ontario, Quebec, Alberta, and BC	Bank-level encryption, Canadian data storage	\$30 per visit	https://tiahealth.com
WELL Health Virtual Clinic+*	Access to a medical provider (even family doctors) through the platform by virtual appointment. Services include sick notes, prescription renewals, discuss lab test results, and receive requisitions for testing. *Tia Health and Virtual Clinic+ have collaborated to expand their services and number of providers	100%	BC, Alberta, Ontario			https://virtualclinics.ca
Cover Health	A virtual walk-in clinic to provide access to a medical provider with same-day appointments to assess medical issues such as cold and flu symptoms, eye infections, sick notes, medication renewals, reproductive health, etc.	100% OHIP	Ontario	Security infrastructure and data privacy policies	\$30 for paramedical services	https://cover.health

GoeVisit	Access to a medical provider on a smart phone app. Receive diagnosis, treatment plans and prescriptions if needed.	-	Canada-wide	PHIPA and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Compliant	-\$49.95 per visit -Subscription plans \$99.95 annually for unlimited visits -\$149.95 annually for families	https://goevisit.com
TELUS Health MyCare	Access to a physician, counsellor, and/or dietician	100%	Canada-wide	Security and Privacy Policies	\$120 for counsellors and dieticians if not covered	https://www.telus.com/en/personal-health/my-care
Maple	Access to a physician to assist with a variety of medical issues such as cold and flu, mental health, general prescription renewals, sexual health, as well as specialist appointments such as dermatology, pediatrics, oncology, etc.	-	Canada-wide	Security infrastructure and data policies	-Pay-per visit \$69.00 -Membership of 30 visits per year \$30.00 per month	https://www.getmaple.ca
Tulip Health	One can directly connect with an Ontario healthcare professional for a virtual appointment to save time and lineups and avoid the walk into clinics or hospitals.	100% OHIP	Ontario	Privacy policy	Services are free for all Ontario residents with a valid OHIP card	https://tuliphealth.ca

Medication Management/Services

Electronic Medication Management (EMM) refers to the use of digital technologies to manage and optimize medication-related processes, including prescribing, dispensing, administration, and monitoring¹⁰. EMM systems can improve patient safety and reduce medication errors by providing healthcare professionals with real-time access to patient medication information, drug interactions, and allergy alerts. Additionally, EMM can enhance medication adherence and streamline medication reconciliation processes.

EMM systems have furthermore been shown to improve medication adherence and reduce hospital readmissions¹¹. The review also highlights the potential benefits of EMM systems for patients with chronic diseases who require complex medication regimens. Overall, EMM systems have the potential to improve patient outcomes and reduce healthcare costs by improving medication safety and adherence. The table below provides an overview of medication management related platforms, some for use by patients from the comfort of their own homes and others for use by healthcare staff in residential care.

¹⁰ <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/medication-safety/electronic-medication-management>

¹¹ Gates PJ, Hardie RA, Raban MZ, Li L, Westbrook JI. How effective are electronic medication systems in reducing medication error rates and associated harm among hospital inpatients? A systematic review and meta-analysis. J Am Med Inform Assoc. 2021 Jan 15;28(1):167-176. doi: 10.1093/jamia/ocaa230.

Table 2: Medication Management/Services

Medication Management/Services						
Platform	Description	Coverage	Jurisdiction	Security	Cost (if not covered)	Link
Felix	Canadians can get lifestyle medications e.g. for birth control, acne & hair loss through an online visit, answering questions & get a prescription within 24 hours. The medication is shipped to one's residence at no extra cost.	-	Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan & Ontario	Privacy Policy SSL secure	The fee for an online visit through Felix is \$40	https://www.felixforyou.ca
Maple	On Maple doctors can provide a prescription online for most medications. However, for other prescriptions like narcotics or opiates one needs to visit a family practice or walk-in clinic.	-	Canada-wide	Security infrastructure and data policies	Pay-per visit \$69.00 Membership of 30 visits per year \$30.00 per month	https://www.getmaple.ca/features/online-prescriptions/
xPill Pro	Helps health professionals manage medication distribution to retirement home residents	-	Canada-wide	Privacy policy	Starting price is free and it has a free version	https://xpillpro.com/
MED e-care eMAR	Helps healthcare centers looking for an Electronic Medication Administration solution	-	Canada-wide	Privacy Policy	Not provided by vendor	https://mede-care.com/medication-treatment-management

Mental Health Services

In Canada, there are several options for virtual mental healthcare services, including online therapy platforms such as Wellness Together, Focus Mental Wellness, Inkblot and MindBeacon, which connect clients with licensed mental health professionals. Some platforms such as Wellness Together are completely publicly funded virtual mental health services through governmental healthcare systems¹². However, others like Focus Mental Wellness might be covered by personal health insurance plans or paid for individually by service users who choose to use these platforms¹³.

Overall, there are different pull factors that can influence a person's decision to choose one online mental health service over another which may include^{14,15,16}:

1. **Reputation:** A mental health service's reputation may be a significant pull factor for potential users. A service that has a positive reputation for effective treatment, reliable support, and user satisfaction is more likely to attract users than one with a low rating or poor reputation.
2. **Accessibility:** Users may be drawn to online mental health services that are easily accessible, such as those that offer 24/7 availability or have user-friendly platforms that are easy to navigate.
3. **Cost:** The cost of online mental health services may be a pull factor for some users. Services that offer affordable or low-cost options may be more attractive to users than those that are more expensive.
4. **Therapeutic approach:** Online mental health services that offer a therapeutic approach that aligns with a user's preferences or needs may be more attractive. For example, some users may prefer cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), while others may prefer mindfulness-based therapy.

¹² <https://www.wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA>

¹³ <https://focusmw.com>

¹⁴ Gulliver, A., Griffiths, K. M., & Christensen, H. (2010). Perceived barriers and facilitators to mental health help-seeking in young people: a systematic review. *BMC psychiatry*, 10(1), 113.

¹⁵ Agyapong, V. I. O., Ahern, S., McLoughlin, D. M., & Farren, C. K. (2012). Supportive text messaging for depression and comorbid alcohol use disorder: single-blind randomised trial. *Journal of affective disorders*, 141(2-3), 168-176.

¹⁶ Duffecy, J., Riley, W., & Rizo, C. (2014). Telehealth and eHealth interventions for posttraumatic stress disorder. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 16(9), 485.

5. **Personalization:** Online mental health services that offer personalized treatment plans or can tailor therapy to an individual's specific needs may be more attractive to users than those that offer a one-size-fits-all approach.
6. **Privacy and security:** Users may be drawn to online mental health services that prioritize privacy and security. Services that use secure communication channels, have strong privacy policies, and comply with data protection laws may be more attractive to users who value their privacy.
7. **Availability of licensed professionals:** The availability of licensed mental health professionals may be a significant pull factor for users seeking online therapy. Services that have licensed therapists or counselors may be more attractive to users than those that rely on unlicensed or uncertified providers.

The table below provides an overview of mental health services platforms.

Table 3: Mental Health Services

Mental Health Services						
Platform	Description	Coverage	Jurisdiction	Security	Cost (if not covered)	Link
Focus Mental Wellness	A secure online healthcare platform and mobile app that conveniently provides video, phone, and text therapy to Canadians struggling with mental health issues and substance abuse	Covered by some personal health insurance plans	Canada-wide	PHIPA, PIPEDA compliant	Video and Phone Therapy \$120-\$150/ hour Text Therapy \$29-\$39 /week	https://focusmw.com
InkBlot	Digital mental health service, focusing on offering secure online video counselling through corporate mental health programs and individual counselling services	-	Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec	Privacy Policy, Encrypted network	\$100/ hour	https://www.inkblottherapy.com
Mind Beacon	Digital mental health platform offering access to a wide range of mental health supports, a 24/7 crisis text line, and unlimited access to account history	Covered by some personal health insurance plans	Canada-wide	HIPAA, PHIPA, PIPEDA compliant	Live therapy sessions \$130-\$195 hour Guided CBT program \$50 one-time assessment 2 payments of \$150 and a final payment of \$175 for the program	https://www.mindbeacon.com

BetterHelp	An online counseling and therapy platform that connects users with licensed mental health professionals. The service offers virtual counseling sessions with therapists via video, phone, chat, or messaging for a wide range of mental health services, including depression, anxiety, stress, relationship issues, and more.	-	Canada-wide (covers the US as well)	Privacy policy	Therapy costs from \$70 - \$120 per week (billed every 4 weeks) based on location, preferences, and therapist availability.	https://www.betterhelp.com/
Wellness Together Canada	Mental health and substance use support for people in Canada and Canadians abroad. Wellness Together Canada was created in response to a rise in mental health and substance use concerns since the COVID-19 pandemic. It is funded by the Government of Canada.	Always free and virtual, 24/7.	Canada-wide	Privacy policy	-	https://www.wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA

EaseCare	EaseCARE Medical is a mental health care provider focused on a holistic team approach offering access to a community of mental health experts ranging from counselors, to physicians, to psychiatrists.	Alberta health card.	Alberta	Privacy policy	-	https://www.easecare.ca/
----------	---	----------------------	---------	----------------	---	---

Electronic Medical Record

Electronic medical records (EMRs) are digital versions of paper-based medical records that contain information about a patient's medical history, diagnoses, medications, allergies, lab results, and more. The use of EMRs has become increasingly widespread in recent years, as healthcare providers seek to improve patient care, streamline administrative tasks, and reduce medical errors. An EMR system can be a central interface for all physicians to communicate and facilitate care increasing access as well as reducing medication errors and improved health management¹⁷.

According to the 2022 CMWF International Health Policy Survey of Primary Care Physicians the adoption of EMRs by primary care physicians in Canada has increased from 73% in 2015 to 93% in 2022 which is similar to the CMWF average of 93%¹⁸.

The table below provides an overview of the electronic medical record platforms and their features.

¹⁷ Manca DP. Do electronic medical records improve quality of care? Yes. Can Fam Physician. 2015 Oct;61(10):846-7, 850-1. PMID: 26472786; PMCID: PMC4607324.

¹⁸ <https://www.cihi.ca/sites/default/files/document/expansion-of-virtual-care-in-canada-report-en.pdf>

Table 4: Electronic Medical Record (EMR)

Electronic Medical Record							
Platform	Description	Features	Coverage	Jurisdiction	Security	Cost (if not covered)	Link
Alembico	Comprehensive electronic medical records (EMR) solution for patient management, engagement, and medical billing	-ePrescribing -Charting -Decision Support Software	-	Canada-wide	Privacy policy and two-factor authentication	Not stated by vendor	https://alembicoemr.com/
Juno EMR	Cloud-based EMR solution fully integrated with provincial Medical Billing and Labs systems in Canada as well as PHR, Patient engagement, eFaxing, Telehealth systems and much more	-Coding Assistance -Decision Support - Software -ePrescribing -Charting	-	Canada-wide	Privacy policy	\$249 /month for the 1st full-time equivalent practitioner FTE*	https://www.junoemr.com/about/
Juvonno	Juvonno is the all-in-one EMR software that tailors to different practices where users can book, bill, chart, schedule, report, and communicate from one platform.	-ePrescribing -Charting	-	Canada-wide	-HIPAA, PIPEDA & PCI Compliance -Two-Factor Authentication -99.99% Uptime SLA -256-Bit Encryption	Lite- \$49/location Premium - \$89/location Enterprise \$499/location (For clinics with 5+ locations or 100+ staff)	https://www.juvonno.com/

ClinicSense	ClinicSense offers health & wellness practitioners industry best documentation, Subjective, Objective, Assessment and Plan (SOAP) notes, customizable intake and consent forms, online booking, appointment reminders, invoicing & payments, and integrated marketing tools.	-Charting	-	Canada-wide	Privacy policy	Lite - \$59 (40 appointments/month) Standard - \$93 (200 appointments/month) Premium – \$210 (unlimited)	https://clemicsense.com/
Telus Med Access EMR	Med Access is a highly configurable EMR that adapts to clinic, user and workflow needs. It is a fast and reliable web-based solution with robust reporting, powerful task management, point-of-care decision support and convenient remote access.	-Charting -ePrescribing	-	Canada-wide	Privacy policy	Not stated by vendor	https://tinyurl.com/42jw6kxw
Jane	Cloud-based booking platform which helps clinics with workflow management, practitioner management, scheduling, billing, patient record keeping and documentation.	-Coding Assistance -Decision Support Software -ePrescribing -Charting	-	Canada-wide	-	Base plan - \$79/month Insurance Plan - \$102/month Corporate plan - \$399/month	https://jane.app/

intakeQ	intakeQ offers PracticeQ, powerful practice management including scheduling, payment, appointment reminders, secure messaging, telehealth, invoicing and insurance billing	-Charting	-	Canada-wide	Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)	IntakeQ – forms only \$49.90/month (\$20 per additional practitioner) PracticeQ - \$74.90 (\$25 per additional practitioner)	https://intakeq.com/
PointClickCare	Helps senior care facilities and senior living homes seeking a healthcare management solution	-Charting -Compliance Tracking -ePrescribing -Self Service Portal	-	Canada-wide	Privacy policy	Not stated by vendor	https://pointclickcare.com/

*Full time equivalent

Conclusion

In conclusion, virtual care has revolutionized the healthcare industry by providing patients with access to primary healthcare and mental health services from the comfort of their own homes. This innovative approach to healthcare has been made possible by the use of electronic medical records, which enable healthcare providers to access patient information and provide personalized care. With virtual care, patients can receive timely care for a wide range of conditions, without the need for in-person visits. As technology continues to evolve, it is likely that virtual care will play an increasingly important role in the future of healthcare. Overall, virtual care offers a convenient, efficient, and effective way to improve access to primary healthcare and mental health services.