



Virtual Care after COVID-19: A Viable Alternative for Health Care Delivery in Canada

June 15, 2020 (Toronto) The rapid and dramatic shift to virtual care during the COVID-19 pandemic, and high satisfaction levels from patients, are promising signs for the future of health care delivery in Canada, Canada Health Infoway (Infoway) announced at Collision from Home.

Since the onset of the pandemic, Infoway surveys show that almost 60 per cent of primary care visits have been conducted virtually – by phone, video or messaging – enabling patients and physicians to connect safely at a distance to reduce the spread of the virus. Prior to the pandemic, 10-20 per cent of primary care visits were conducted virtually. Patient satisfaction has been strong, with more than 80 per cent saying they were very or somewhat satisfied with the visit.

“As a result of the pandemic, the adoption and use of virtual care progressed more in six weeks than it had in six years, and Canadians have been satisfied with the experience,” said Michael Green, President and CEO, Infoway. “That’s a good indication that virtual care will be an excellent complement to in-person visits in the future.”

Green said four key themes can help ensure continued progress with virtual care:

- Clinical and political leadership to influence policy at the provincial, territorial and national levels using a rational, evidence-based approach;
- Patient advocacy to support the use of virtual care, not just during times of crisis;
- Supporting clinicians with modern, integrated, easy-to-use tools to privately and securely deliver optimal virtual care; and
- Modernizing clinicians’ remuneration structures (billing codes in fee-for-service arrangements) to support quality virtual care and continuity of care.

Virtual care has other significant benefits in addition to high levels of patient satisfaction. In 2019, it saved patients more than 11.5 million hours in travel time and more than \$595 million in expenses, while reducing carbon (CO₂) emissions by 120,000 metric tonnes. Infoway projects that if the number of primary care virtual visits were to increase to 50 per cent of total visits annually, Canadians would save 103 million hours in travel time and \$770 million in expenses, and CO₂ emissions would be reduced by 325,000 metric tonnes. That reduction in CO₂ emissions is equivalent to taking more than 70,000 passenger vehicles off the road for one year, powering 50,000 homes with electricity for a year, or the carbon sequestered by 5.4 million tree seedlings grown for 10 years.





“The COVID-19 crisis has been a catalyst for the adoption and use of virtual care as an alternative for health care delivery in Canada,” Green said. “We now have an opportunity to build on this momentum to realize even greater benefits for Canadians and our health system.”

About Canada Health Infoway

Infoway helps to improve the health of Canadians by working with partners to accelerate the development, adoption and effective use of digital health across Canada. Through our investments, we help deliver better quality and access to care and more efficient delivery of health services for patients and clinicians. Infoway is an independent, not-for-profit organization funded by the federal government. Visit www.infoway.ca.

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