



How Virtual Care is meeting the needs of patients in the COVID-19 landscape and beyond

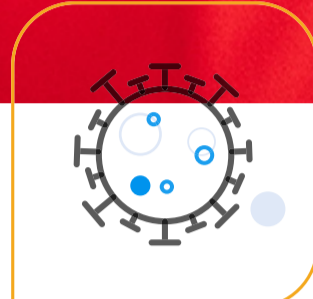
Patient Stories

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the relevance of virtual care in the delivery of primary and community care services. As COVID-19 cases rose throughout B.C. in the spring of 2020, many health-care providers necessarily looked for new ways to provide safe and effective health services for patients.

According to a [May 2020 survey from the Canadian Medical Association](#), Canadians who accessed health-care advice during the pandemic through telephone, email, video or text, reported a 91% satisfaction rate.

Approximately 86% of the B.C. patients surveyed connected with a physician virtually from April to September 2020. For many, it was their first time using virtual care services.

Online visits and phone appointments are useful tools that became necessary during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to play a role in a post-pandemic environment. However, as most medical conditions require one or more in-person appointments over the course of a patient's treatment, health-care professionals will necessarily need to continue to provide a blend of virtual and in-person care to best support patient needs.



The Patient Experience of Virtual Care



Over a two year period beginning in 2019, the Ministry of Health, in partnership with the [Patient Voices Network](#), gathered patient feedback over several sessions from its Virtual Care Patient Advisory Groups. The advisory groups are made up of volunteer patients from communities throughout B.C. and help provide input on virtual care policies in the province. The sessions included a diverse group of patients who highlighted their experiences with health care in British Columbia. These patients spoke to the benefits of virtual care from their own experiences, including that it is:

- Easy to navigate and reduces geographic barriers;
- Fits into their busy schedules; and,
- Helpful for those with chronic illnesses and/or those who require regular routine appointments.

Having access to virtual care options supports patients in addressing their unique health-care needs. While virtual care will never replace the need for in-person visits in some situations, having virtual care options is an important way to provide choice in how primary and community care is offered.

Bridging Distances: Jane's Story*



Jane lives with a chronic illness and resides in a rural community in the province. Due to her remote location and requirement for specialized care on an ongoing basis, she has had to drive over five hours for regular check-ups, which means she also has to book time off work and arrange for childcare for her young children. In addition, because of her condition, her older daughter often accompanies her to these appointments. Once her specialist began offering virtual appointments, Jane could receive specialized care from her own home, eliminating significant travel time for both herself and her daughter as well as the time spent away from her family.

Jane especially enjoys that both she and her provider get to see each other and communicate much as they would if the visit was in-person. She plans to continue communicating with her specialist virtually after the pandemic. In the future, Jane recognizes that she may need to balance in-person visits with virtual care, but she appreciates that her specialist offers more flexibility for her to choose.

Reducing Barriers: Mark's Story*



Mark resides in an urban area of the province and lives with severe arthritis. Due to his condition, he has faced challenges leaving his home and going to routine appointments with his family physician. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mark's physician began offering phone and video appointment as alternatives to in person visits, when appropriate. Since then, Mark has been able to easily speak to his physician for regular general checkups on the phone.

Mark has found that phone visits with his family physician have been a great alternative to in-person care for his routine appointments. He has been pleased to receive care that is comparable to in-person appointments, without having to address the mobility challenges that his condition exacerbates.

Perfect Balance: Brooke's Story*

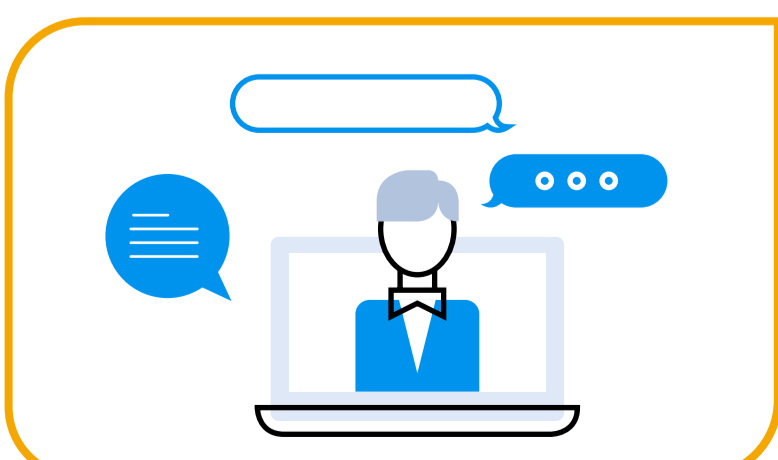
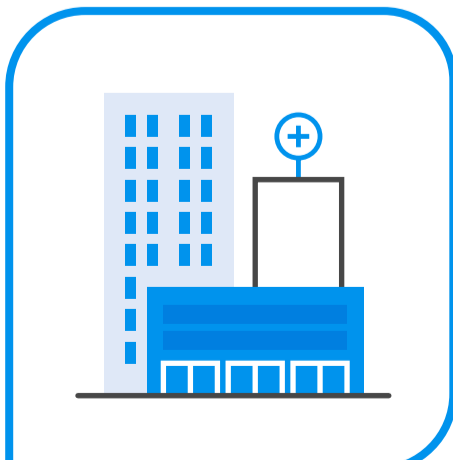


Brooke experiences chronic pain that she has treated with regular steroid injections, coupled with routine appointments with her family doctor. Once her doctor began offering virtual appointments, Brooke was able to add phone appointments for routine checkups with her doctor, combined with in-person visits for her steroid injections. She was able to experience the convenience and benefits that virtual care has to offer her, while still seeing her physician for in-person care when required. For Brooke, the combination of in-person and virtual care has been extremely valuable in helping her to safely manage her condition.

Names have been changed to protect patient anonymity and confidentiality

Next Steps

Moving forward, the Ministry of Health, in partnership with health-care providers will be identifying ways to sustain the benefits of virtual care. With the right provincial policies and infrastructure in place, the combination of in-person and virtual care is enabling more accessible care to British Columbians where and when they need it.



We welcome your input and feedback. Contact us at: MOHNewsletter@gov.bc.ca