

# Canadian Provincial and Territorial Medical Regulatory College Guidance for Delivery of Virtual Mental Health Services in Primary Care: Policy Overview

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# Executive Summary



As virtual mental health care usage increases across Canada, much has been written regarding how best to deliver virtual health care, mental illness-specific or otherwise, to patients. Indeed, most provincial and territorial medical regulatory authority colleges in Canada have released documents guiding physicians on the appropriate use of eHealth technologies on their websites. In this document, we summarize and condense their guidance into a set of recommendations that can be used by physicians wishing to deliver virtual mental health services. These recommendations are summarized below:



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- Virtual care can be a useful and viable method of care for patients with anxiety, depression, or other mental health conditions that may make it difficult to attend in-person appointments.

It is especially useful for patients in remote areas who may have difficulty accessing in-person care or who fear facing stigma related to mental illness.

- The appropriateness of virtual mental health care should be assessed for each individual patient; furthermore, virtual care should be tailored to the needs and wishes of the patient.

Measures that assess the appropriateness of virtual mental health care for a patient should include taking a thorough history and assessing patient suicidality and safety risk.

- Ensuring patient safety and quality of care should be paramount for providers before, during and after virtual mental health care appointments.

Steps to ensure patient safety and quality of care include using appropriate technology, protecting patient privacy and security, and using evidence-based practices to provide quality care.

- Providers should ensure that patients give informed consent prior to commencing any virtual mental health care appointments.

Patients should receive counseling on any potential risks of virtual mental health care they may experience, such as inherent threats to confidentiality when interacting using virtual modalities in a non-confidential environment, such as a public place. Counseling can also include discussions on documentation of patient information as well as follow-up care.

- Training and lessons on professional development should be available for providers on the provision of virtual mental health care.

This training should include guidance on billing and other administrative aspects of virtual care. There should also be guidance on maintaining professional boundaries.



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# British Columbia

<https://www.cpsbc.ca/files/pdf/PSG-Virtual-Care.pdf>

- The link is a document from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia (CPSBC) titled “Professional Standards and Guidelines – Virtual Care”. The document provides guidance for physicians and healthcare providers in the province of British Columbia on the delivery of virtual care services.

Summary:

- The recommendation highlighted in the document includes:
- **Consider the appropriateness of virtual care for mental health services:** Virtual care can be an effective option for individuals with mental health conditions who may face barriers to accessing in-person care. However, it is important to consider whether virtual care is appropriate for each individual patient situation.
- **Ensure confidentiality and privacy:** Confidentiality is especially important in mental health care, and it is crucial to ensure that virtual care services are delivered in a private and secure manner. Healthcare providers should use secure platforms and take steps to protect patient privacy.
- **Obtain informed consent:** Informed consent is essential for all healthcare services, including virtual care. Healthcare providers should explain the risks and benefits of virtual care to patients and obtain their consent before providing services.
- **Document care appropriately:** Healthcare providers should ensure that documentation for virtual care is complete, accurate, and timely. This includes documenting any mental health assessments or treatment plans.

- **Consider accessibility and equity:** Healthcare providers should be aware of potential barriers to accessing virtual care, such as lack of technology or internet access. They should take steps to ensure that virtual care services are accessible and equitable for all patients, including those with mental health conditions.
- The document also highlights the importance of considering mental health and well-being in the provision of virtual care services. It notes that virtual care can be an effective option for individuals with mental health conditions who may face barriers to accessing in-person care. Specific mental health conditions mentioned in the document include anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- The document emphasizes the necessity of ensuring that virtual care services are given in a safe, effective, and ethical manner, and that they satisfy the same criteria as in-person care.



# Ontario



<https://www.cpsso.on.ca/en/Physicians/Policies-Guidance/Statements-Positions/eHealth>

The link is a webpage from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) titled "eHealth". The webpage provides guidance for physicians in the province of Ontario on the use of eHealth technologies in the delivery of healthcare services, including virtual care.

## Summary

The recommendation highlighted in the document includes:

- **Virtual care can be an effective tool for providing mental health services**: The document notes that virtual care can be particularly useful for mental health services, as it can improve access to care and provide ongoing support for patients with mental health conditions.
- **Physicians should ensure that virtual care services are delivered in a safe and effective manner**: The document emphasizes the importance of using eHealth technologies, including virtual care, in a manner that ensures patient safety and quality of care. This includes considerations related to patient privacy and confidentiality, informed consent, and documentation.
- **Physicians should consider the appropriateness of virtual care for each patient and situation**: While virtual care can be an effective tool for providing mental health services, it may not be appropriate for every patient or situation. Physicians should consider factors such as the patient's condition, the complexity of the care needed, and the availability of resources when determining whether virtual care is appropriate.
- **Virtual care should be used in conjunction with in-person care where appropriate**: The document notes that virtual care should be used in conjunction with in-person care where appropriate, such as for initial assessments or in situations where a physical examination is required.

Specific mental health conditions mentioned in the document include depression, anxiety, and addiction.

Generally, the webpage emphasizes the importance of using eHealth technologies, including virtual care, in a safe and effective manner. It provides guidance for physicians on the appropriate use of eHealth technologies, including considerations for patient privacy and confidentiality, informed consent, and documentation.

<https://www.cpsso.on.ca/Physicians/Policies-Guidance/Policies/Virtual-Care/Advice-to-the-Profession-Virtual-Care>

The link is to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) policy on virtual care, titled "Advice to the Profession: Virtual Care". The policy provides guidance for physicians in the province of Ontario on the appropriate use of virtual care in the delivery of healthcare services.

The policy notes that virtual care can be an effective tool for delivering mental health services. Specific mental health conditions mentioned in the policy include depression, anxiety, and addiction.

## Summary

The policy provides several recommendations for the use of virtual care in the context of mental health services, including:

- **Assess the appropriateness of virtual care for each patient and situation:** Physicians should consider factors such as the patient's condition, the complexity of the care needed, and the availability of resources when determining whether virtual care is appropriate.
- **Ensure patient safety and quality of care:** Physicians should take steps to ensure that virtual care services are delivered in a safe and effective manner. This includes ensuring that the technology used is reliable and secure, and that appropriate measures are taken to protect patient privacy and confidentiality.
- **Use virtual care in conjunction with in-person care where appropriate:** Virtual care should be used in conjunction with in-person care where appropriate, such as for initial assessments or in situations where a physical examination is required.



- **Use evidence-based practices:** Physicians should use evidence-based practices when delivering virtual care services for mental health conditions, and should ensure that they are following best practices in the delivery of care.

Overall, the policy emphasizes the importance of using virtual care in a manner that is safe, effective, and appropriate for each patient and situation. It provides guidance for physicians on the appropriate use of virtual care in the context of mental health services, and highlights the potential benefits of virtual care for patients with mental health conditions.

# Alberta

[https://cpsa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/AP\\_COVID-19-Virtual-Care.pdf](https://cpsa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/AP_COVID-19-Virtual-Care.pdf)

The link is to the Canadian Medical Protective Association's (CMPA) Standards of Practice for virtual care. The document outlines the best practices for providing virtual care, including conducting assessments, obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and ensuring appropriate follow-up care.

Regarding mental health, the document notes that virtual care can be particularly useful for patients with mental health conditions, as it provides access to care in a more convenient and less stigmatizing manner. The document suggests that physicians should be aware of the potential for technology-related barriers to accessing virtual mental health care, such as a lack of reliable internet or privacy concerns.

The document does not list any specific mental health conditions, but it does recommend that physicians use validated tools for assessing and monitoring mental health conditions during virtual care appointments. Additionally, the document suggests that physicians provide patients with clear instructions for emergency situations and make appropriate referrals for in-person care when necessary.

<https://cpsa.ca/physicians/standards-of-practice/virtual-care/>

The link is to the website of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, which provides information on virtual care standards of practice for physicians in Alberta.

The website outlines the definition of virtual care and provides guidance on when it is appropriate to use virtual care versus in-person care. It also covers various aspects of virtual care, including communication methods, documentation, privacy and security, and emergency situations.

With regards to mental health, the website recommends that physicians consider using virtual care for mental health assessments and consultations. It notes that virtual care can be particularly helpful for patients with anxiety, depression, or other mental health conditions that may make it difficult to attend in-person appointments.

It does not list any specific mental health conditions or recommendations beyond the general guidance on virtual care. However, it does emphasize the importance of maintaining appropriate standards of care and ensuring that virtual care is provided in a manner that is safe, effective, and appropriate for the patient's needs.



# Saskatchewan

[https://www.cps.sk.ca/imis/CPSS/For Physicians/Patient Care/Virtual Care/CPSS/For Physicians/Patient Care/Virtual Care.aspx?hkey=534927ea-eb4b-4ec2-ba89-d09928e2bd07](https://www.cps.sk.ca/imis/CPSS/For%20Physicians/Patient%20Care/Virtual%20Care/CPSS/For%20Physicians/Patient%20Care/Virtual%20Care.aspx?hkey=534927ea-eb4b-4ec2-ba89-d09928e2bd07)

The link provided is to the website of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan, Canada, and it provides information on virtual care for physicians and patients.

The website also highlights the importance of considering privacy and security concerns when using virtual care technologies. Physicians are advised to use secure platforms and follow best practices for protecting patient information.

Regarding mental health, the website notes that virtual care can be especially helpful for patients with mental health conditions who may have difficulty accessing in-person care. It recommends that physicians use virtual care to provide mental health assessments, consultations, and therapy.

The website does not list any specific mental health conditions, but it does provide recommendations for physicians to follow when providing virtual care for mental health. These recommendations include taking a thorough history, assessing suicidality and risk, and using evidence-based treatment modalities.

<https://www.cps.sk.ca/iMIS/Documents/PANDEMIC/COVID-19/2020.05.01%20Practical%20guidance%20for%20Virtual%20Care%20delivery%20during%20the%20COVID-19%20pandemic.pdf>

The link provided is a document from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan, Canada that provides practical guidance for delivering virtual care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The document highlights the importance of virtual care during the pandemic, as it can help reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 for both patients and healthcare providers. It also notes that virtual care can be especially useful for patients with mental health conditions, who may be at increased risk of experiencing mental health challenges during the pandemic.

The document recommends that physicians use virtual care technologies, such as videoconferencing, to provide mental health assessments, consultations, and therapy. It emphasizes the importance of ensuring that patients have access to appropriate technology and that their privacy and security are protected.

While the document does not list specific mental health conditions, it does provide recommendations for physicians to follow when providing virtual care for mental health. These recommendations include taking a thorough history, assessing suicidality and risk, and using evidence-based treatment modalities.

This document provides useful guidance for physicians on how to deliver virtual care during the COVID-19 pandemic, including recommendations for providing mental health care.

# Nova Scotia

<https://novascotia.ca/dhw/publications/Provision-of-Publicly-Funded-Virtual-Health-Services.pdf>

The link provided is a report from the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness that discusses the provision of publicly funded virtual health services in Nova Scotia, Canada.

Regarding mental health, the report notes that virtual care can be particularly helpful for patients with mental health conditions who may have difficulty accessing in-person care. It recommends using virtual care to provide mental health assessments, consultations, and therapy. The report emphasizes the importance of ensuring that patients have access to appropriate technology and that their privacy and security are protected.

The report does not list specific mental health conditions, but it provides recommendations for healthcare providers to follow when providing virtual care for mental health. These recommendations include taking a thorough history, assessing suicidality and risk, and using evidence-based treatment modalities.

In general, the report provides guidance for healthcare providers on how to provide virtual care services, including mental health care, in a publicly funded system. It emphasizes the importance of ensuring equitable access to care, protecting patient privacy and security, and using evidence-based practices.



<https://doctorsns.com/sites/default/files/2020-05/toolkit-virtual-care.pdf>

The link provided is a toolkit for virtual care provided by Doctors Nova Scotia, which is designed to help physicians navigate the shift to virtual care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The toolkit highlights the benefits of virtual care, including increased access to care, improved patient outcomes, and reduced costs. It notes that virtual care can be particularly useful for patients with mental health conditions who may be at increased risk during the pandemic.

While the toolkit does not list specific mental health conditions, it does provide recommendations for physicians to follow when providing virtual care for mental health. These recommendations include taking a thorough history, assessing suicidality and risk, and using evidence-based treatment modalities.

In conclusion, the toolkit provides guidance for physicians on how to provide virtual care services, including mental health care, during the COVID-19 pandemic. It emphasizes the importance of ensuring that patients have access to appropriate technology, protecting patient privacy and security, and using evidence-based practices.



# Northwest Territories

<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/nwt-healthnet/telehealth>

The link provided is to the website of Northwest Territories Health and Social Services, which provides information about their telehealth services.

The website notes that telehealth is a form of virtual care that allows patients to access healthcare services remotely through the use of technology such as videoconferencing and telephone. The website emphasizes that telehealth can be particularly useful for patients in remote areas who may have difficulty accessing in-person care.

While the website does not specifically mention mental health, it notes that telehealth can be used to provide a variety of healthcare services, including consultations, assessments, and follow-up care. It provides information on how to access telehealth services and encourages patients to speak to their healthcare provider to determine if telehealth is an appropriate option for their care.

# Yukon Territories



<https://www.yukonmedicalcouncil.ca/images/downloads/physicians/YMCS-3.11 Telemedicine Std Final.pdf>

The link provided is a telemedicine standard developed by the Yukon Medical Council. The standard defines telemedicine as "the practice of medicine using telecommunication technologies to diagnose, treat, and monitor patients at a distance."

The standard includes a section on mental health, noting that telemedicine can be particularly useful for patients with mental health conditions who may have difficulty accessing in-person care. It highlights the importance of ensuring that patients have access to appropriate technology and that their privacy and security are protected.

While the standard does not list specific mental health conditions, it provides guidance for healthcare providers on how to provide telemedicine services for mental health care. These recommendations include taking a thorough history, conducting assessments, and developing treatment plans based on evidence-based practices.

Overall, the telemedicine standard provides guidance for healthcare providers on how to provide telemedicine services, including mental health care, in a safe and effective manner. It emphasizes the importance of using appropriate technology, protecting patient privacy and security, and using evidence-based practices to provide quality care.

<https://policybase.cma.ca/viewerfile=%2Fmedia%2FPolicyPDF%2FPD19-03S.pdf#page=1>

The link provided is a policy document developed by the Canadian Medical Association on virtual care in Canada. The policy document outlines recommendations for virtual care in Canada, including mental health care.

The policy document notes that virtual care has the potential to improve access to care for patients with mental health conditions. It emphasizes the importance of ensuring that virtual mental health care is provided in a safe and effective manner, with appropriate technology, training, and support for healthcare providers.

While the document does not list specific mental health conditions, it provides guidance on how to provide virtual mental health care, including taking a thorough history, conducting assessments, and developing treatment plans based on evidence-based practices.

The policy document emphasizes the importance of integrating virtual care into existing healthcare systems and ensuring that it is accessible and equitable for all patients. It also highlights the need for ongoing evaluation and research to ensure that virtual care is effective and provides quality care.

The policy document provides a comprehensive overview of virtual care in Canada and its potential for improving access to care, including for mental health conditions. It provides guidance for healthcare providers on how to provide virtual care in a safe and effective manner and emphasizes the importance of ongoing evaluation and research.

# Newfoundland



<https://www.yukonmedicalcouncil.ca/images/downloads/physicians/YMCS-3.11 Telemedicine Std Final.pdf>

The link provided is a telemedicine standard developed by the Yukon Medical Council. The standard defines telemedicine as "the practice of medicine using telecommunication technologies to diagnose, treat, and monitor patients at a distance."

The standard includes a section on mental health, noting that telemedicine can be particularly useful for patients with mental health conditions who may have difficulty accessing in-person care. It highlights the importance of ensuring that patients have access to appropriate technology and that their privacy and security are protected.

While the standard does not list specific mental health conditions, it provides guidance for healthcare providers on how to provide telemedicine services for mental health care. These recommendations include taking a thorough history, conducting assessments, and developing treatment plans based on evidence-based practices.

Overall, the telemedicine standard provides guidance for healthcare providers on how to provide telemedicine services, including mental health care, in a safe and effective manner. It emphasizes the importance of using appropriate technology, protecting patient privacy and security, and using evidence-based practices to provide quality care.

# New Brunswick



<https://cpsnb.org/en/medical-act-regulations-and-guidelines/code-of-ethics>

The link provided is to the Code of Ethics of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New Brunswick, Canada. The Code of Ethics outlines the professional and ethical obligations of physicians in New Brunswick.

It emphasizes that physicians must ensure the confidentiality and privacy of patient information when using electronic communication, and virtual care should not compromise the quality of care provided. In regards to mental health, the Code emphasizes that physicians have a responsibility to provide appropriate care to patients with mental health issues. It recognizes that mental illness is a legitimate and treatable medical condition, and it is important to avoid any behavior that could be seen as exploitative or harmful to patients. The Code also emphasizes the importance of respecting patient autonomy and informed consent, as well as the need for physicians to maintain appropriate boundaries in the physician-patient relationship.

The Code does not list any specific medical condition, but it provides general recommendations for physicians to provide compassionate, non-judgmental care to patients regardless of their medical condition or background. It encourages physicians to provide care that is based on the best available evidence and tailored to the individual needs of each patient and encourages ongoing education and professional development to ensure that physicians provide the highest quality of care to their patients.



<https://cpsnb.org/en/medical-act-regulations-and-guidelines/guidelines/888-virtual-medicine>

The link provided is to the Virtual Medicine Guidelines of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New Brunswick, Canada. These guidelines provide recommendations for physicians who are using virtual care in their medical practice.

The guidelines emphasize the importance of ensuring that virtual care is appropriate for the patient's medical condition and that it does not compromise the quality of care provided. They provide recommendations for physicians on how to ensure that virtual care is appropriate for the patient's mental health condition and that it does not compromise the quality of care provided. They also emphasize the importance of ensuring that patients have access to appropriate mental health services, whether through virtual care or other means.

The guidelines do not list any specific medical condition, but they provide general recommendations for physicians to provide high-quality care to patients using virtual care. They emphasize the importance of ongoing education and professional development to ensure that physicians provide the highest quality of care to their patients. Additionally, the guidelines provide recommendations for documentation, billing, and other administrative aspects of virtual care.



# Quebec

<http://www.cmq.org/publications-pdf/p-1-2021-04-06-fr-fiche-4-conditions-necessaires-teleconsultations.pdf?t=1666969849868>

The link provided is in French, is a PDF document from the Collège des médecins du Québec (College of Physicians of Quebec) about the necessary conditions for teleconsultations for four specific medical conditions. Here is a summary of the information available:

The document outlines the necessary conditions for teleconsultations for four specific medical conditions: hypertension, depression, diabetes, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). The recommendations are based on a review of the available evidence and best practices for teleconsultations.

For each condition, the document outlines the necessary conditions for a successful teleconsultation, including the equipment needed, the patient's level of comfort with the technology, and the availability of medical records and other relevant information. The document also provides recommendations for how to ensure that the teleconsultation is effective and safe for both the patient and the physician.

Regarding mental health, the document specifically mentions depression as one of the conditions for which teleconsultations can be effective. It notes that teleconsultations can help to overcome barriers to accessing mental health services, such as geographic distance, stigma, and transportation issues.

The document provides specific recommendations for physicians on how to ensure that teleconsultations for these conditions are effective and safe. It emphasizes the importance of informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy in teleconsultations. Additionally, the document provides recommendations for documentation, follow-up care, and billing for teleconsultations.

\*It is important to note that this document is specific to the conditions and guidelines of the College of Physicians of Quebec and may not apply to other regions or countries.

<http://www.cmq.org/page/fr/telemedecine.aspx>

The link provided is in French and it is to the telemedicine page of the Collège des médecins du Québec (College of Physicians of Quebec).

It defines telemedicine as the use of technology to provide medical services from a distance and notes that it can be an effective tool for improving access to care and reducing barriers to care.

Regarding virtual care, the page provides information on the different types of telemedicine, including teleconsultation, telemonitoring, and teleexpertise. It also outlines the necessary conditions for successful telemedicine, including the need for appropriate technology, informed consent, and confidentiality.

In regards to mental health, the page notes that telemedicine can be an effective tool for providing mental health services, particularly for patients who face barriers to accessing care. It emphasizes the importance of ensuring that telemedicine is appropriate for the patient's mental health condition and that it does not compromise the quality of care provided.

No specific medical condition is listed, but it provides general recommendations for physicians to provide high-quality care to patients using telemedicine. It highlights the importance of ongoing education and professional development to ensure that physicians provide the highest quality of care to their patients. Additionally, the page provides recommendations for documentation, billing, and other administrative aspects of telemedicine.

\*It is important to note that this information is specific to the guidelines and regulations of the College of Physicians of Quebec and may not apply to other regions or countries.\*