

Online Appointment Booking platforms that are integrated into the clinic's EMR can create administrative efficiencies, resulting in potential cost savings for clinics.

Ontario Health has provided funding for the installation, onboarding, and licensing costs for healthcare practitioners who have implemented Online Appointment Booking (OAB) as members of an Ontario Health Team. This is part of the Government’s goal to advance the adoption of digital health services and improve access to high-quality care for all Ontarians.

Compared to traditional methods of medical appointment booking, OAB proves several benefits for multiple stakeholders. By providing patients with the autonomy to search for appointment times linked directly to their healthcare practitioners’ schedules and select the most convenient time slot for their appointment, OAB promotes patient-centeredness and improves health care quality.¹ In addition to improving the patient experience, clinics may also see several benefits through the adoption of OAB practices. Without OAB, clinic staff spend a significant amount of time fielding inbound calls and confirming appointments with patients.³ Implementing OAB will allow clinic staff to spend their working hours on other value-added tasks, cutting down traditional patient follow-up methods.²

Traditional methods of medical appointment booking by phone can cost between \$1-5 each and amount to 25 percent of the cost of running a clinic.³ Implementing OAB can cut such costs by approximately 70 percent as there is not a need for a designated receptionist to field patient booking calls.³ In addition to less time spent fielding phone calls, OAB has shown a reduction in missed appointments, leaving the healthcare practitioners’ schedules running optimally.

SRS Medical adopted OAB to improve workflow efficiencies, reduce the cost of clinic expenses, and empower their patients to be proactive about the care process and management of their well-being. The clinic experienced several benefits related to administrative efficiencies, outlined in **Figure 1**.

Fig 1. Identified benefits of OAB from the perspective of SRS Medical

	Integration of OAB with EMR means administrative support is less involved in the booking process
	Improvement in efficiency and reduction in administrative burden by decreasing time spent scheduling and confirming appointments
	Allows administration to focus on other value-added tasks and providing patient-centred care
	Potential costs saving benefits with administrative costs avoided by reduction of phone booking

I have seen the effects of overworked and overwhelmed staff in our office. We are always looking for ways to improve efficiency and lessen stress. Online booking has definitely contributed positively to both of those aspects. Decreasing the amount of emails and phone calls for appointments has lessened staff demands and allows for more time to better tackle the many other tasks that need completion.

Kindra Murphy, SRS Medical Office Manager

Figure 2 presents an Economic Assessment conducted with 3 clinics to illustrate the future expected savings from administrative costs avoided per month for each health care practitioner, in three different clinics.

- Administrative costs avoided are related to the number of minutes saved by administrators from a reduction of time spent on scheduling and confirming appointments over the phone.
- **Clinic A** has implemented OAB for a period of 3 months; **Clinic B** has implemented for 2 months; **Clinic C** has implemented for 1 month.
- Potential future conversion rates range from 50% to 90% of OAB in clinics.

The clinics presented have experienced a gradual increase in uptake of OAB each month since implementation. Currently, OAB conversion rates at the clinic range from 5% to 10% of appointments. Most OAB licenses cost clinics an average of \$50/per month/license. It is expected as more patients learn about the availability of OAB and become comfortable with the technology, more appointments will be converted to OAB over time. Taking into account the licensing cost of \$50 a month per license, this represents potential cost savings for physicians ranging from \$103 to \$252 per month.

As more data becomes available, the Economic Assessment will include actual conversion rates clinics are experiencing and will be updated on a regular basis to reflect current conversion rates and the cost savings associated.

Figure 2: Potential Cost Savings of Clinics Implementing OAB

Clinic A

Percent of appts booked online	50%	70%	90%
Savings from admin cost avoided per month/per schedule	\$115	\$181	\$247

- Average of 880 appts/per month
- Average cost of \$1.5 per phone appointment booked
- Cost of OAB license \$50/per month/per license
- 3 Physicians & 1 Physician Assistant in clinic

Clinic B

Percent of appts booked online	50%	70%	90%
Savings from admin cost avoided per month/per schedule	\$103	\$165	\$226

- Average 1636 appts/per month
- Average cost of \$1.5 per phone appointment booked
- Cost of OAB license \$50/per month/per license
- 8 physicians in clinic

Clinic C

Percent of appts booked online	50%	70%	90%
Savings from admin cost avoided per month/per schedule	\$118	\$185	\$252

- Average of 1120 appts/per month
- Average cost of \$0.9 per phone appointment booked
- Cost of OAB license \$50/per month/per license
- 3 physicians in clinic

If you have any questions or would like further information on this case study, contact communications@ehealthce.ca.

Authored by: Ummu Almaawi & Zainab Khan, eHealth Centre of Excellence
Published: July 2022

Works Cited:

1. Zhao, P., Illhoi, Y., Lavoie, J., Lavoie, B. J., & Simoes, E. (2017). Web-Based Medical Appointment Systems: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 134.
2. Telus Health. (2019, May). *Rethinking primary care delivery in the digital age. How Canadian practices are using technology to become more efficient and patient-focused.*
3. Canadian Healthcare Technology. (2018, May 1). *Online scheduling for clinics can reduce costs.* Retrieved from <https://www.canhealth.com/2018/05/01/online-scheduling-for-clinics-can-reduce-costs-restore-profitability/>