

Virtual Visits in Primary Care: A case study on the patient experience

Virtual visits provided patients with convenient access to primary care, avoiding the use of emergency department visits and walk-in clinics for issues that can be addressed by primary care providers, ultimately supporting continuity of care.

According to the 2017-2018 Health Care Experience Survey, although ninety-four percent (94%) of Ontarians have a family doctor or nurse practitioner, they are not always choosing to use, or have timely access to their primary care providers as the first access point to health care.¹ Forty-one percent (41%) of Ontarians who went to the emergency department, and ninety-three percent (93%) who went to a walk-in clinic received care for a condition that could have been addressed by their primary care provider.¹ Virtual care provides an opportunity to shift healthcare access to conveniently meet patient needs.²⁻³

In March 2018, the eHealth Centre of Excellence in collaboration with the Ontario Telemedicine Network initiated the deployment of a virtual care solution across Waterloo-Wellington, enabling secure two-way digital communication between primary care providers and their patients through asynchronous chat messaging, or synchronous audio or video conferencing through a dedicated platform.

Figure 1. Patient and Provider-initiated Virtual Visits.



Since the launch of the program in Waterloo Wellington in March 2018 until May 31, 2019, 67 primary care providers (gradually throughout the year) registered for the solution, which resulted in:

6.9k

Patients registered

8.3k

Completed virtual visits
initiated by patients

75%

Proportion of patient-
initiated visits

“The ability to have a virtual visit with my doctor reduces the need for a 45-minute drive to see my doctor for health concerns that can be dealt with through a virtual visit. My doctor monitors my progress while transitioning medications, without the need for me to visit their office. The virtual care application is easy to use and such a convenient way to get the care I need.”

Anonymous Patient, Waterloo Wellington

As seen below, the availability of virtual visits avoided use of emergency department and walk-in clinic visits, and supported access to care for a proportion of patients that would not have sought care.

Patient experience survey findings (n=470) have illustrated that if a virtual visit had not been available:



4% would have visited the **emergency department**

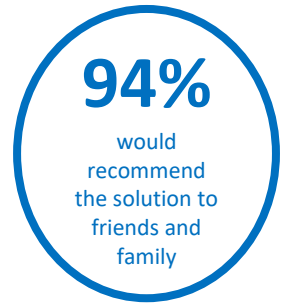
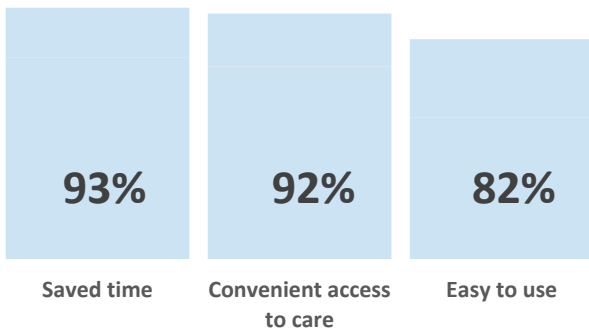


10% would have gone to a **walk-in clinic**

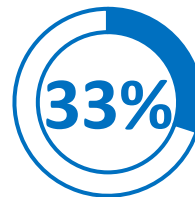


3% would have done **nothing**

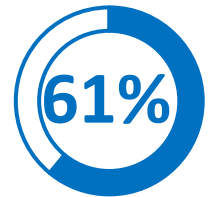
In addition, a majority of patients indicated that virtual visits saved them time, provided convenient access to care and were easy to use.



When asked about their experience with the virtual visit in **comparison to an in-person visit** (n=420):



...rated virtual visits as **better than in-person visits**



...rated virtual visits as the **same than in-person visits**

Overall, virtual visits promoted the delivery of patient-centric care, enhancing access to and continuity of care for patients that would have gone elsewhere for their healthcare, or would not have sought care in a timely manner.

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

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Works Cited:

1. Devlin, R. et al. (2019). Hallway Health Care: A System Under Strain. 1st Interim Report from the Premier's Council on Improving Healthcare and Ending Hallway Medicine.
2. McGrail, K. M., Ahuja, M. A., and Leaver, C.A. (2017). Virtual Visits and Patient-Centered Care: Results of a Patient Survey and Observational Study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 19(5).
3. Jamieson, T. et al. (2015). Virtual Care: A Framework for a Patient-Centric System. Women's College Hospital Institute for Health Systems Solutions and Virtual Care (WIHV).

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