

# Case Study: Exploring the Experience of eReferral Users in Primary Care



Primary Care eReferral users have contributed significantly to the growth of eReferral throughout Ontario and their perspective is essential in highlighting the benefits and opportunities that eReferral support.

The uptake of eReferral across Ontario has been increasing substantially over the past seven (7) years, with over 3 million referrals processed to date and over 15,000 end users having accessed the solution.

In September 2023, eReferral users from across Ontario were surveyed and a total of **868** responses were received. The survey allowed users to share their experiences with eReferral using rating scales, complemented by open-ended feedback.

Primary care has played a significant role in the expansion of eReferral, representing 65% of users and submitting over 80% of the total eReferral volumes. Due to this, feedback from primary care practitioners is vital in evaluating eReferral as they understand the elements that are essential to ensure effective, patient-centered care. In 2023, 505 survey responses were received from users within Primary Health Care or Family Health Teams. These users provided over 250 comments across 3 questions regarding eReferral, addressing aspects such as changes in usage frequency, satisfaction, and recommendations for the tool. A qualitative analysis of the feedback from primary care practitioners has been conducted, and key findings are summarized in thematic groupings below accompanied by quotes from eReferral users to further demonstrate the user perspective.

## Streamlined Workflow & Easy to Use

Users note that eReferral is easy to use and it is a great addition to their workflow. eReferral streamlines the referral workflows within organizations that send referrals by utilizing integrations with multiple EMRs.

This allows for the auto-population of information into referral forms.

*"Incredibly useful tool to streamline ordering tests and making referrals. Ocean has been one of the single most effective new tools I have used in my 6 years in practice." – Primary Care Physician*

## Improved Patient Care

eReferral improves efficiency and effectiveness in managing patient care by including patient email notifications. This keeps patients informed about the status of their referral, fostering a more transparent and patient-centered approach to care.

*"It's very easy to use and the addition of patient's email address means pts are updated with status of referral, and so pts don't need to contact the office to check on status of their referral." – Nurse Practitioner*

## Improves the Ability to Track the Status of Referrals

eReferral helps save time by enabling users to easily track whether a referral has been accepted or declined by allowing for the automatic updating of the referral back into the EMR.

*"Less paperwork and tracking down correct referral form. Tracking [is] easy and updates get posted to chart. Love it.." – Primary Care Physician*

*"My admin says it really simplifies the tracking of referrals on our end." – Primary Care Physician*

## Need for Further Adoption Provincially

Users indicate that they wish more sites would adopt eReferral so they could use eReferral for all specialties and services to expand their eReferral usage and experience the benefits on a wider scale.

*"It would be nice for more offices to use ocean." – Referral Clerk*

*"I like using the eReferral, however there are not enough accepting providers in my area"  
– Primary Care Physician*

## Background

The Technology Acceptance Model<sup>1</sup> emphasizes that “acceptability” – the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of a technology – plays a crucial role in influencing users’ willingness to adopt new technologies and electronic health solutions. It also impact users' intentions to use the technology, ultimately driving its adoption. These elements are important for clinicians as they directly influence the likelihood of adoption, which in turn impacts workflow efficiency, patient care, and clinical outcomes. This model is crucial for digital health research and practices to inform relevant solutions for treatment providers.

The eReferral User Satisfaction Survey is designed to gather feedback from users of the eReferral solution, assessing satisfaction, acceptability, and overall user experience. This feedback is essential for evaluating the tool’s performance and guiding future developments. Beyond the themes previously highlighted, users also offer valuable insights into the system’s technical functionality. These insights are leveraged through various feedback channels to implement technical improvements and enhancements, ultimately refining the user experience.

eReferral is being adopted into Primary Care Users’ workflows, with 81% of primary care User Satisfaction survey respondents indicating they utilize the tool on a weekly basis. However, further uptake is needed for users to truly experience the benefits on a larger scale.

Overall, qualitative feedback from users suggests that the solution offers improved efficiency compared to traditional referral methods. Analysis of the data revealed common themes, including time-saving benefits for both patients and clinics, reduced paper waste, and improved communication between patient facilities.

*“The eReferrals are much easier, faster, safer than fax referrals. Since they provide better care for patients, we are increasingly choosing specialists who accept eReferrals over fax-only recipients”*

Primary Care Physician, User Satisfaction Survey

## Acknowledgements

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If you have questions or would like more information, contact [communications@ehealthce.ca](mailto:communications@ehealthce.ca).  
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## Works Cited

1. Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *MIS quarterly*, 319-340.

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