



## A Call for Support for Family Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Background

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated fundamental changes to family practices across Canada that are expected to have long-term effects on the delivery of primary care. Family practices need resources and appropriate support to help clinicians manage patients as safely as possible and meet requirements for high-quality, continuous care.

### Current efforts/challenges

In response to the pandemic, primary care clinics and family practices will need to expand their capacity for screening, isolation, and triage.<sup>1</sup> In addition, while non-essential care may be delayed safely, continuity of care for patients with serious chronic medical conditions should be maintained.<sup>2</sup> Those who need vaccines should also see their family doctors. Some consults may take place virtually, but virtual care requires support such as the technology and equitable remuneration to be in place.

Family practices are expanding telemedicine services and other virtual care options for their patients to ensure that care is accessible and continuous. Such care can be provided using various modalities including phone calls, video chats, and email; however, it must be appropriately remunerated to ensure physicians' ability to deliver care remains financially viable. A 2020 report from the Virtual Care Task Force—a collaboration between the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC), the Canadian Medical Association, and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (Royal College)—provides a series of recommendations to help scale up virtual care services.<sup>3</sup>

Some resources in place to support family physicians in providing virtual care include:

- A webinar the CFPC hosted on virtual care, of which a recording is available<sup>4</sup>
- A list of resources the Royal College has curated that includes new billing codes for virtual care in each jurisdiction, as all provinces and territories are encouraging the use of telemedicine and virtual care<sup>5</sup>

### Action required

- Interprovincial barriers to licensure must be reduced to allow for enhanced patient access to care, even when it is being delivered remotely by a physician in another province or territory. This would be particularly helpful for rural, remote, and Indigenous communities.
- Greater support to help physicians access virtual care technology and resources is needed across the country.
- The general public needs to hear consistent messaging from reliable government sources that medical visits need to be maintained during the pandemic. Family practices are enacting new measures to provide care safely. Neglecting necessary medical care during this time may lead to serious long-term consequences.

## Contact us

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## References

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