Microsoft

Taking virtual care
to the next level with
Microsoft Teams

A rapidly changing landscape

Canadians are increasingly embracing virtual healthcare solutions, and this trend has only accelerated since the COVID-19 crisis. In 2019, the Ontario Telemedicine Network reported a 36 per cent increase in virtual events from the previous year, with 353,000 patients accessing virtual care—more than ever before.[i] Canadians' reliance on virtual healthcare surged in 2020 after the pandemic hit Canada:

60% of visits became virtual instead of in-person by the end of April 2020 (up from 20 per cent)[ii]

240% There was 240 per cent growth in virtual care (new users over existing users)[iii]

81% Patients reported an 81 per cent satisfaction rate when asked about the modality of their virtual visit.[iv]

By improving access to care, enabling better collaboration among clinicians, and facilitating care delivery for a greater swath of the population, virtual healthcare is transforming healthcare ecosystems for patients and physicians across Canada.

Achieving the best possible outcome rests on adopting technological solutions that help deliver the full vision of virtual care, enabling different stakeholder groups to benefit from its full potential.

The challenge: A complete virtual care solution that meets stakeholder groups' varying needs

Optimizing virtual healthcare means understanding the unique needs of patients and clinicians, as well as the IT staff supporting them.

From the patient's perspective

The primary reasons patients engage in virtual care stem from:

- Access barriers, such as living in remote regions where quality care may be limited.

- Mobility issues.

- Professional or living situations that hinder a patient's ability to take time off for in-person visits.

During the COVID-19 crisis, patients have also engaged in virtual visits due to concerns about personal safety, as well as restrictions on in-person appointments with healthcare providers.

Virtual care allows patients to overcome access barriers; however, an effective virtual care model must satisfy patients' needs for convenience and ease-of-use while addressing security concerns around sharing sensitive information. A virtual care solution that addresses these concerns and provides a seamless experience has a greater chance of being adopted by patient populations.

From the clinician's perspective

As clinicians increasingly incorporate virtual care into their practices, they need tools and technology that effectively address two priority areas:

Improved care delivery: Clinicians need easy-to-use tools that allow them to connect and communicate with patients while respecting privacy. This means technology that incorporates features such as screen sharing and background blurring, while providing a consistent experience on any device. Integrated post-care follow-up is also important.

Better peer collaboration: Clinicians need a virtual care model that provides a robust platform for collaboration with colleagues. Fragmented systems that impede the flow of information and the hand-off of patient data make it harder for clinicians to coordinate care with team members, which can negatively affect patient outcomes.

These two areas are interdependent. Improved collaboration with colleagues helps physicians access the right information at the point of care, in turn empowering them to perform their jobs to the best of their abilities. Meanwhile, access to best-in-class tools and technology supports physicians in delivering the best quality of care to their patients.

i   Ontario Telemedicine Network. (2020). Virtual Care in Action. (https://otn.ca/virtual-care-in-action-archives/)

ii M, Green. (2020). Virtual Care is the Future of Health Care Delivery in Canada. (http://www.healthcareimc.com/main/virtual-care-is-the-future-of-health-care-delivery-in-canada/)

iii Mckinsey & Company. (2020). Survey: Canadian consumer sentiment during the coronavirus crisis. (https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/survey-canadian-consumer-sentiment-during-the-coronavirus-crisis)

iv Canada Health Infoway. (2020). Experiences of health care during COVID-19 reported by Canadians. (https://www.infoway-inforoute.ca/en/component/edocman/3815-covid-19-tracking-survey-results/view-document?Itemid=0)

From an IT leader's perspective

IT staff working in the healthcare arena need robust solutions that easily integrate into the broader technology infrastructure, while meeting the needs of the clinicians they support and the ecosystems in which they operate. An optimal virtual care platform will support several needs at once, such as:

- Enabling virtual visits for patients and physicians.

- Simplifying IT management with easy-to-use end-user security controls.

- Alleviating patient concerns about security and data privacy without impacting clinicians' productivity.

In healthcare, important decisions affecting people's lives often need to be made quickly. This underscores the need for a comprehensive care platform that simultaneously addresses the varying needs of different stakeholder groups, providing peace of mind to IT staff working in a healthcare environment.

The solution: A virtual care platform powered by Microsoft Teams

By enabling virtual visits, clinician collaboration, and communication with patients—while protecting data and providing a user-friendly experience—Microsoft Teams is an all-in-one platform that's becoming a game-changer in the virtual care space.

For patients:

By allowing patients to access quality care safely from the comfort of their own homes, Microsoft Teams provides countless benefits, including:

- **Convenience:**
  - Patients receive a customized email with appointment details and a meeting link for their virtual visit.
  - Patients can easily complete intake forms digitally .
  - Automatic reminder emails help patients remember appointments (while minimizing no-shows for providers).

- **Ease of use:**
  - Patients join their virtual visit with one simple click from their desktop web browser or the Teams mobile app – no need for patients to have an Office 365 or Teams license.

- **Seamless experience:**
  - A virtual lobby mimics the experience of waiting in a doctor's office. Once the clinician admits the patient, the provider and patient can engage in HD video conferencing.
  - Integrated post-care follow-up makes next steps easy.
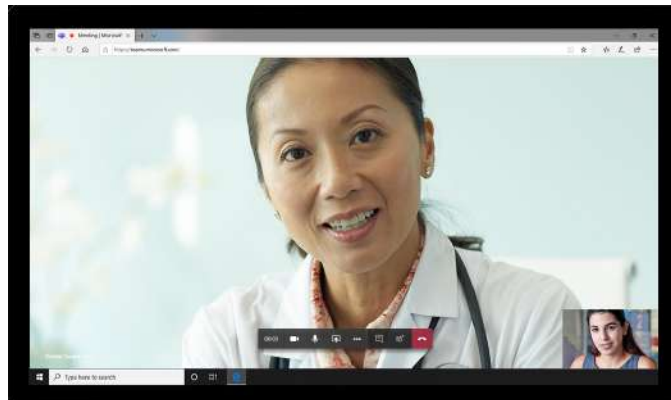
For clinicians:

By providing a platform that facilitates connection with patients and collaboration with colleagues, Microsoft Teams empowers clinicians to provide more timely and effective care. The platform enhances the delivery and quality of care by enabling:

- **Better patient engagement:**
  - Teams' video conferencing function allows physicians to provide high-quality, personalized care to patients, no matter where they're located.
  - Features such as screen sharing and live captions further enhance the virtual care experience.
  - Teams' Bookings app simplifies scheduling virtual appointments.
  - Clinicians can include patient education videos and prep instructions, ensuring patients are informed and prepared for their virtual visit.

- **Improved clinician collaboration:**
  - Teams acts as a hub for multidisciplinary care teams to collaborate and synchronize their activities in a single place.
  - Treating physicians can easily loop in remote medical specialists during a patient's virtual visit.
  - Residents can identify available attending physicians, virtually present patients, and conclude visits in a three-way call.

- **Seamless physician communication:**
  - The Teams app improves clinicians' ability to hand off information to other team members, helping physicians get the right information at the right time.
  - Teams provides easy access to comprehensive patient information, bringing together disparate data sources and workflows to improve diagnosis and treatment decisions.

For IT leaders:

Built on the Microsoft 365 cloud, Teams delivers state-of-the-art security and compliance capabilities, minimizing the risk of data breaches. Teams makes it easier for IT leaders to support healthcare teams while fulfilling security and privacy needs, thanks to the following features:

- **One single, secure location for information exchange**
  - Clinicians can share patient information and images securely through encrypted messaging.
  - The background blur feature helps safeguard sensitive protected health information located behind clinicians during virtual visits.
- **End-user authentication**
  - Multi-factor authentication and self-service password resets boost security while simplifying IT management.
- **Best-in-class built-in security**
  - Access to sensitive data is controlled with Azure Active Directory's identity management service.
  - Teams is backed by advanced security that meets or exceeds regulatory compliance needs.

Teams in action: Improving care delivery and fuelling better outcomes

Two healthcare institutions have experienced Teams' transformative effects first-hand after adopting the virtual care platform.

How Teams helped Lakeridge Health pivot to virtual care during the pandemic

When the COVID-19 crisis hit, Lakeridge Health, a primary health provider in Ontario, had to adapt quickly to a virtual care model as patient visits skyrocketed by 800 per cent. The hospital turned to Microsoft 365 and Teams for a customized solution that would meet its needs. For patients requiring assessment for the virus, but not yet in need of testing, Teams was instrumental. Using Teams for virtual assessments provided clinicians with a better understanding of a patient's symptoms, so they could advise patients who likely did not have the virus to stay at home, reducing risk for patients and staff. The combination of Microsoft 365 and Teams also allowed Lakeridge Health to establish over 30 new virtual clinics in a matter of weeks. "We were creating a new clinic every couple of days," said Andrew Kelly, Lakeridge Health's Director of IT Strategy and Innovation.

How Teams enabled the IT team at CMHA Peel Dufferin to improve staff support

When the Canadian Mental Health Association Peel Dufferin branch (CMHA Peel Dufferin) launched Microsoft 365 with Teams prior to the COVID-19 crisis, they didn't know how prescient this move would be. With 56 per cent of Canadians reporting a negative impact to their mental health since the outbreak of the pandemic,[v] CMHA Peel Dufferin—which has been supporting people with mental illness for more than 55 years—was well positioned to help those in need. As restrictions prevented mental healthcare providers from meeting with clients in person, Teams was pivotal for virtual appointments while alleviating privacy concerns. "When our team had to quickly shift to a new model for supporting our clients in an accessible, low-cost way, we turned to Microsoft Teams," said community support worker Nivetha Sivaranjan.

Accelerate your digital transformation with Teams

Your healthcare organization can use Teams as a hub for teamwork as well as a platform for services and tools to get work done more efficiently. You can create a customized solution and tailor your Teams workspace to suit your organization's needs. You can also extend Teams with templates, tabs, connectors, and bots to bring access to data and insights from clinical and line-of-business applications directly into the collaboration canvas.

Are you ready to kick-start your organization's digital transformation?

For more information about Microsoft 365 for Healthcare, please contact your Microsoft account representative or visit https://www.microsoft.com/en-ca/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/healthcare-solutions.

v   Ipsos. (2020). Majority (56%) of Canadians Say COVID-19 Having a Negative Impact on their Mental Health. (https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-and-polls/Majority-Of-Canadians-Say-COVID-19-Having-Negative-Impact-On-Their-Mental-Health)