



Virtual Primary Care

FY2021-22 Funding Criteria

1. Introduction

The Ministry of Health has approved funding to help Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) and In Development Teams looking to become approved OHTs to strengthen and optimize virtual primary care programs and services that improve the patient experience through integrating timely access to primary care services with other services offered through OHT partners. This funding is intended to support the recovery of the health system by increasing access to key services, transforming how care is delivered, and building OHT digital maturity.

The COVID-19 pandemic required primary care providers across Ontario to rapidly adopt virtual care to maintain access to primary care services. Patient experience surveys have shown that patients value continued access to virtual care as COVID-19 pandemic restrictions are lifted and in-person services resume. Beyond the pandemic, primary care teams within OHTs can also design virtual care programs to improve access to target populations, such as mental health and addictions, unattached and/or marginalized patients.

Ontario Health (OH) is inviting proposals that align with the following priorities:

- Improve the patient experience by optimizing primary care workflow and integration with OHT partners to support access to in-person and virtual care services (when appropriate).
- Virtual care models for target populations, including but not limited to frail seniors, patients with mental health and substance use disorders, palliative care and chronic diseases.
- Outreach services for unattached, underserved, or marginalized communities.

This funding is intended to support primary care teams within OHTs and OHT partners to build stronger partnerships. As such, it is highly recommended that primary care teams that are members of an approved OHT or in development OHTs submit a coordinated proposal that includes partnership with OHT partners (e.g. community support services, mental health organizations etc.) that demonstrates alignment with the OHT model. In Development Teams may also submit a proposal and demonstrate how their proposal aligns with the OHT model and are also highly encouraged to include how OHT partners will support the implementation of the proposal. Health care organizations are encouraged to collaborate on a multi-OHT or regional proposal. A multi-OHT submission should demonstrate how their proposal aligns with the OHT model.

Ontario Health welcomes proposals from Indigenous primary care organizations, including those serving First Nations, Inuit, Metis and Urban Indigenous persons, and will provide additional assistance with proposal submission where desired.

Interested health service provider organizations should discuss this opportunity with their Ontario Health Regional Digital Lead, who is responsible for identifying initiatives that best meet the criteria and align with regional clinical priorities and who can help support/advise on proposal development. Upon the

endorsement of the Ontario Regions, proposals will be submitted by the Regional Digital Health Leads. Funding approvals will be overseen by the Ontario Health Digital and Virtual Care Secretariat.

2. Objectives

There is strong evidence that virtual care can improve patient and caregiver experience by facilitating more convenient, timely, and equitable access to care. In addition, virtual care programs can be designed to improve other Quadruple Aim objectives, including improved patient and provider experience, efficiency, and population health outcomes. In most cases, virtual care is most effective when it complements in-person care in the context of established provider-patient relationships.

The objectives of this funding include:

- Enabling patients to access appropriate virtual primary care services that improve their experience and timely access to primary care through optimizing the use of virtual care into the in-person practice workflow.
- Primary care workflow redesign and integration with OHT partners to support optimal access to in-person and virtual care services.
- Enhancing access to primary care for target populations, including but not limited to frail seniors, patients with mental health and substance use disorders, palliative care and chronic diseases through using virtual care tools to support interprofessional collaboration and delivery of care by various OHT partners to the target population(s).
- Implementing or enhancing outreach services through using virtual care tools that would increase access for unattached, underserved or marginalized patient populations.
- Strengthening primary care collaboration with other OHT partners and In Development Teams that support integrated care delivery for target populations.

3. Project Requirements

All successful proposals **must**:

- Be led by an OHT or In Development Teams who would agree to signing a funding agreement with Ontario Health that includes performance targets and reporting requirements. See guidelines below for OHT proposals;
- Demonstrate alignment with one or more of the following priorities:
 - i) Primary care workflow redesign and integration with OHT partners to support optimal access to in-person and virtual care services.
 - ii) Virtual care models for target populations, including but not limited to frail seniors, patients with mental health and substance use disorders, palliative care and chronic diseases.
 - iii) Outreach services for unattached, underserved, or marginalized communities
- Propose an expansion to an existing virtual care program or a net-new virtual care program that improves the patient experience and timely access to care. Note: please review Section 5 to ensure any technology costs included in your proposal are eligible;
- Provide clear explanation on how this funding will be complementary to in-person services (i.e. funding cannot be used to enable a fully virtual model of care) and enable the use of virtual care within an established patient-provider relationship.
- Provide an estimate of the number of patients and caregivers that can be supported up to March 31, 2022;

- Provide an implementation plan with proposed milestones;
- Propose a sustainable operating model that demonstrates how virtual care investments will enhance health human resource capacity. Proposals that include clinical staffing funding requests must propose matching in-kind contributions;
 - Funding cannot be requested to make to the following primary care teams practice back office or overhead costs enhancements (e.g. lease adjustments, infrastructure requests to support the introduction of virtual services etc.).
- Be designed with input from patients with mechanisms to measure and improve the patient experience;
- Demonstrate how services will be provided equitably for patients who face barriers to accessing virtual services because of a lack of devices, internet connectivity or digital literacy;
- Describe how the program will meet the language needs of the communities it serves. Organizations within areas that are designated or partially designated under the French Language Services Act (FLSA) should describe how services will be provided in French to the Francophone community;
- Include a commitment to participate in an evaluation;
- Be reviewed, submitted, and endorsed by the OH region; and
- Acknowledge that funding is only available for FY 2021/22.

4. Additional Project Criteria

All proposals should align with the criteria for **one or more** of the following priorities. Ontario Health welcomes comprehensive proposals that align with multiple priorities.

Primary Care Workflow Redesign and OHT partner Integration

Primary care providers have indicated the need for workflow redesign as part of COVID-19 recovery planning to enable an integrated OHT partner model of in-person and virtual care delivery (when appropriate) with the goals of improving the patient experience, timely access to primary care, OHT partner services and interprofessional collaboration. Proposals focusing on workflow redesign and channel management should:

- Demonstrate how the plan will improve timely access to the appropriate level of in-person and/or virtual care.
- Describe how different virtual care options (video, audio, secure messaging, remote care, digital self-care) will be used clinically appropriately to complement and enhance in-person services across primary care and OHT partners.
- Describe how the model supports improved access to preventative screening.
- Describe how the proposal enables access to same day or next day care, including supports for patients who require after-hours care.
- Describe how the proposal supports collaboration within an OHT primary care groups, OHT partners, specialists and home and community care providers.
- Demonstrate how workflows integrate with OHT partners and enable improved patient experience
- Describe how patients and primary care providers will be engaged to co-design patient clinical pathways.
- Propose a communications plan that will be used to support patient awareness of care options that is supported by primary care groups within the OHT and OHT partners.
- Describe how the proposal will compliment and align with OHT efforts to expand primary care partnerships.

Enhance Care for Target Populations

This funding can be used to support primary care-led interventions that are intended to enhance care for an OHT's target patient population in collaboration with OHT partners, including but not limited to mental health and addictions, frail seniors, palliative and chronic disease patients. Proposals focusing on target populations should:

- Demonstrate how programs and services have been designed to improve the health of a target patient population. Applicants are encouraged to use a population health management approach.
- Propose how different virtual care options (video, audio, secure messaging, remote care, digital self-care) can be used clinically appropriately to complement and enhance in-person services and how it will be used across OHT partners.
- Describe the virtual care program model (referral process, patient onboarding, clinical model and staffing, communication with patient etc.), role of each OHT partner in the model, and how it will address the defined problem and enhance care for their prioritized patient population.
- Describe how the proposal will compliment and align with OHT efforts to expand primary care partnerships.

Implement Outreach Services

Virtual care programs can be designed to deliver outreach services to unattached, underserved, and marginalized patients who are looking for a primary care provider or experience barriers to care. Proposals focusing on outreach services should:

- Describe the population that will be proactively targeted through the intervention. Applicants are encouraged to incorporate a population health management approach.
- Describe the virtual care program model (referral process, patient onboarding, clinical model and staffing, communication with patient and/or circle of care, etc.), role of each OHT partner in the model, and how it will address the defined problem and enhance care for their patient population.
- Describe whether the program will support the referral of unattached patients to a primary care provider to support continuity of care and access to services provided by OHT partners.
- Propose how the program could align with the Provincial Health Care Connect (HCC) Program to improve attachment success (if applicable).
- Propose how different virtual care options (video, audio, secure messaging, remote care, digital self-care) can be used clinically appropriately to complement and enhance in-person services and how it will be used across OHT partners to provide an integrated experience for patients.
- Provide a communication plan for patients and providers to support awareness of the program that is supported by primary care teams within the OHT and OHT partners.
- Describe how the proposal will compliment and align with OHT efforts to expand primary care partnerships.

5. Technology Criteria

- Any funding requested for technology, including infrastructure, solution licenses, set-up or configuration costs, devices, voice or data plans, must support the delivery of health care resources and services to patients.

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- Eligible virtual care tools include patient navigation and screening, online appointment booking, videoconferencing, audio, asynchronous messaging and remote care solutions that support care pathways and the collection and exchange of patient biometric or self-reported data.
 - Digital self-care tools that support health promotion, disease prevention and chronic disease management and provider-to-provider messaging tools may also be eligible if they are part of a broader program that supports the delivery of virtual care services to patients.
 - Proposals for device lending programs, with or without data plans, must be cost-effective, targeted at individuals who face barriers to accessing care, and include a sustainability plan.
 - Proposals that include requests for technology licenses or services for virtual care solutions using video or secure messaging, successful proposals will be required to use a verified solution (<https://otn.ca/providers/verified-solutions/>) or use a solution provider that is actively participating in the verification process by December 31st, 2021.
 - Proposals should explain how the choice of virtual care solutions provides a seamless experience for patients across primary care teams within the OHT and OHT partners (e.g. use of the same verified virtual visit solution across the OHT, interoperability etc.).

6. Approval Process

Interested OHTs, In Development Teams and other health care organizations should contact their OH Regional Digital Lead (contacts in application template) to discuss their proposal. OH, Regions are responsible for facilitating proposal development and determining which should be submitted for funding approval.

Proposals must be documented using the approved Virtual Primary Care Proposal Template. Proposals which are approved by the Ontario Health Transitional Executive Leads will be submitted to Ontario Health Virtual Care Secretariat for funding review and approval. The Secretariat will oversee the allocation of funding to eligible proposals according to a criteria-driven process.

Ontario Health's Population Health & Valued-Based Health Systems team can also be engaged during proposal development as a subject matter expert (OH contact Vivian Henderson Vivian.henderson@ontariohealth.ca).