

THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF HOME-BASED CHRONIC CARE TELEHEALTH RESEARCH IN CANADA

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The British Columbia Alliance on Telehealth Policy and Research (BCATPR) conducted a scoping review entitled *A Synthesis of the Current Evidence Base in Home-Based Chronic Care Telehealth and Identification of Priority Research Questions* to provide a representative picture of home-based chronic care telehealth, and to identify key gaps and priority research questions pertaining to: the patient, the provider and policy

BACKGROUND

Telehealth has been increasingly utilized in Canada to improve patient access to health services despite geographical, cultural and socio-economical barriers and has the potential to prevent hospitalization, reduce health care costs and provide an alternative to conventional hospital outpatient or health professional visits. 51 articles and reports relevant to the Canadian context were synthesized to provide an overview on home-based chronic care telehealth.

KEY POINTS

Patient Theme

- Despite the growing availability of telehealth technology infrastructure, telehealth utilization in Canada remains limited in many home and community settings, and within Canadian primary care settings.
- While data on actual uptake is limited, patients' attitudes to home-based telehealth services are frequently discussed, providing insight into patient willingness to use home-based telehealth applications.
- The evidence presented suggests that home-based telehealth applications can positively affect self-management for patients with chronic disease.
- The most effective home-based telehealth applications to date are monitoring of vital signs and telephone follow-up by nurses for patients with chronic diseases.
- Canadian organizations providing telehealth services to patients – including those in the home setting - rarely perform comprehensive evaluations of telehealth applications. Indeed, only 46% of organizations either actively collected or were developing a collection process for clinical outcomes and cost-analysis data.

Provider Theme

- Home-telehealth systems appear to enhance provider-patient communication and provide closer health monitoring compared to face-to-face consultations. Physicians reported that information derived from home-based telehealth applications is helpful in assisting with patient monitoring and assessing patient stability.
- Information on provider uptake of telemonitoring technologies is rare. Most studies focus on clinical and behavioural outcomes/changes, and not on provider perceptions or uptake.

Policy Theme

- While the data are sparse in terms of detailing specific policies on home-based telehealth, the literature tends to focus on national or provincial level telehealth policies for service delivery in clinics and hospitals. Above all, critiques of current telehealth care policy – or the lack thereof – dominate the literature.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the literature on telehealth is constantly growing, this scoping review demonstrates that the research on home-based telehealth applications is far from comprehensive, particularly in the Canadian context. Nevertheless, the priority research questions conceived from the gaps identified in this review are expected to stimulate further avenues for research on home-based telehealth applications to help inform policy-makers and health care providers in telehealth implementation. The entire report written by Dr. Sandra Jarvis-Selinger and Dr. Joanna Bates can be accessed through the BCATPR website: www.BCATPR.ca.

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