

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care
2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario
Ministry of Health and Ontario Health

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
1. To achieve the virtual-care objectives in its Digital First for Health Strategy (Strategy), we recommend that the Ministry of Health: 1.(i) specifically define what virtual care includes and how it fits into the provincial health-care system in terms of technology and physician billing;	MOH The ministry has an approved Digital First for Health strategy.	MOH This is an ongoing activity. The ministry's annual multi-year planning process establishes funding to meet government direction on virtual care, and this is accompanied by results to be achieved and metrics to measure progress.
1.(ii) revisit its existing Strategy in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learned;	MOH The ministry has an approved Digital First for Health strategy. The future strategy for virtual care will also be informed by two large-scale, third party evaluations that examined the benefit of virtual care in integrated care models and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the rapid adoption of virtual care. Both evaluations identified high-value activities for system stakeholders to deliver benefits to patients, providers and the health system.	MOH This is an ongoing activity. The ministry's annual multi-year planning process establishes funding to meet government direction on virtual care, and this is accompanied by results to be achieved and metrics to measure progress. The ministry will be using the findings from the evaluation report led by Centre for Digital Health Evaluation's on Virtual Care adoption during COVID to inform its approach to virtual health care policy in a number of areas, including incorporating a stronger health equity lens, advancing the use of various virtual care modalities across the health care system and continuing to support virtual care adoption in primary care settings.

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care 2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario *Ministry of Health and Ontario Health*

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
1.(iii) identify annual and long-term targets for virtual care availability and use;	MOH The ministry has an approved Digital First for Health strategy.	MOH This is an ongoing activity. The ministry's annual multi-year planning process establishes funding to meet government direction on virtual care, and this is accompanied by results to be achieved and metrics to measure progress.
1.(iv) measure and publicly report on its results against these targets.	MOH See above	MOH See above
2. To provide Ontarians with convenient virtual-care options, we recommend that the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ontario Telemedicine Network within Ontario Health, review its policies and structures around physician delivery of and billing for virtual care to identify ways of expanding the availability of virtual-care options in Ontario.	MOH Both the ministry and Ontario Health have been reviewing its policies and structures around delivery and billing for virtual care. The ministry and Ontario Health as part of their regular monthly priorities and planning meetings bring new policies and proposed structures around delivery of virtual care for discussion. As part of the government's Digital First for Health strategy, Ontario Health as the province's primary delivery and implementation partner has established the Virtual Visit Solution Verification Process. The private sector's involvement in the verification process is key to its success. The public list of verified solutions already reflects some of the larger vendors that account for significant market share in the Ontario virtual care solution marketplace, with more vendors expected to be reflected in the coming months. The verification process accords providers with a choice of virtual care delivery options that both meets their needs and provincial standards for privacy, security and interoperability. Ontario's verification process provides a competitive landscape that is both responsive to market needs and ultimately improves the patient and provider experience.	MOH The Ministry of Health will continue to collaborate with Ontario Health on an ongoing basis to review policies and structures around physician delivery of and billing for virtual care. The ministry is committed to providing multiple options of virtual care delivery, including secure messaging. Furthermore, the ministry regularly considers the best approaches to billing to support a full range of VC options that have measurable benefits for Ontarians.

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care 2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario Ministry of Health and Ontario Health

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
3. To provide Ontarians with an opportunity to access care virtually through a reliable platform in a timely and convenient way, we recommend that the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ontario Telemedicine Network (Telemedicine Network) within Ontario Health: 3.(i) [MOH-OH] Engage physicians and others who have used and those who have not to identify concerns/issues, identify opportunities for improvement and implement.	Ontario Health Ontario Health is committed to partnering with physicians and others to provide meaningful opportunities to share concerns and issues with virtual care solutions and associated processes to improve provider and patient experiences on an ongoing basis. Ontario Health engages with physicians and others to offer input and feedback in multiple ways including but not limited to: • Ontario Health initiated regular customer satisfaction surveys and follow-up interviews, • On-line feedback imbedded in Ontario Health supported solutions, • Direct engagement with individuals and groups of providers who co-design/co-develop solutions, • Engagement with organizations representing groups of providers and others to solicit their thoughts, and • Through third party vendors who work closely with providers in developing their solutions. Ontario Health provides a means for any physicians/others who have or have not used virtual care for communicating feedback through the Ontario Health supported website 'contact us' e-mail. Ontario Health has a process for responding to those who provide input, to collate and analyze feedback and to use that feedback to drive the product improvement roadmap and to inform process improvements. MOH As part of the government's Digital First for Health strategy, Ontario Health as the province's primary delivery and implementation partner has established the Virtual Visit Solution Verification Process. The private sector's involvement in the verification process is key to its success. The public list of verified solutions already reflects some of the larger vendors that account for significant market share in the Ontario virtual care solution marketplace, with more vendors expected to be reflected in the coming months. The verification process accords providers with a choice of virtual care delivery options that both meets their needs and provincial standards for privacy, security and interoperability. Ontario's verification process provides a competitive landscape that is both responsive to market needs and ultimately improves the patient and provider experience.	MOH The Ministry of Health considers this an ongoing activity and will continue to collaborate with Ontario Health to identify specific concerns and issues physicians have with the platform and opportunities for improvement. Ontario Health Ontario Health's processes for identifying concerns and issues to identify opportunities for improvement and implement are ongoing and incorporated into Ontario Health's operating plan. Further, through the work virtual visit verification work, Ontario Health will continue to gain insights from those who are using other platforms and use these to inform enhancements and improvements to the Ontario Health platform.

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care
2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario
Ministry of Health and Ontario Health

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
3.(ii) [MOH-OH] Study virtual-care delivery models or practices in other jurisdictions to determine whether roles should be revisited or changed given the evolution of virtual care.	Ontario Health Ontario Health is committed to continuously monitoring the evolution of virtual care delivery in other jurisdictions with a view to determining whether changes to Ontario's approach may improve patient/provider experiences or be more cost effective. The pandemic has proven an important catalyst for emerging practices and innovative approaches to care delivery. Ontario Health regularly monitors activity and engages with a range of expert stakeholders in jurisdictions around the world, staying abreast of advances in virtual care delivery models and keeping up to date on industry best practices. As an example, Ontario Health is currently working with the New South Wales Agency for Clinical Innovation on a comparison of the two jurisdictions' approaches to virtual care. The Ministry of Health funded Centre for Digital Health Evaluation (CDHE) is leading a national digital evaluation network. Ontario Health is participating in the evaluation of virtual care delivery through the CDHE. Leading practices will continue to inform the evolution and enhancement of Ontario Health's virtual care priorities.	MOH The Ministry of Health and Ontario Health consider this to be an ongoing activity. Ontario Health This is an ongoing activity for Ontario Health.

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care 2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario Ministry of Health and Ontario Health

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
4. To provide Ontarians with more options to access care virtually in a convenient way, we recommend that the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ontario Telemedicine Network within Ontario Health: 4. (i) [MOH-OH] Engage virtual-care providers in other jurisdictions and in the private sector to learn about and apply best practices in the delivery of expanded virtual care in Ontario.	MOH The Ministry of Health has established relationships with digital health and virtual care policy leads in other jurisdictions to learn from their experiences in collaborating with the private sector and patient and provider experience with virtual care. The lessons learned and best practices from other provinces with similarly structured health care systems, inform our approach to virtual on an ongoing basis. As part of the government's Digital First for Health strategy, Ontario Health as the province's primary delivery and implementation partner has established the Virtual Visit Solution Verification Process. The private sector's involvement in the verification process is key to its success. Ontario Health Best practises and evolving technology will continue to inform Ontario's virtual care program. Ontario Health is committed to continuously monitoring and learning about best practices in virtual care delivery and continues to leverage a broad network of experts in other jurisdictions with experience in virtual care. Ontario Health has demonstrated a commitment to work with and learn from the private sector through multiple initiatives including but not limited to engaging with and establishing a video visit vendor verification process to assess third party vendors against a standard to verify their use by broader health sector. As Ontario Health further evolves as an organization, its strategic direction with respect to the private sector will also evolve. This may include how Ontario Health may work together with the Ministry of Health and others across government and non-government entities to bring insights from the private sector to bear on the approach to virtual care in Ontario.	MOH Through participating in the Federal Provincial Territory Virtual Care Table and jurisdictional information sharing we are learning about various virtual care delivery frameworks and role of private sector to consider incorporating into our future virtual care policies. The ministry continues to work closely with Canada Health Infoway, the federal government's lead agency for advancing national digital health priorities, to advance Ontario's virtual care modernization efforts, support alignment with other jurisdictions and share lessons learned. Ontario Health Engaging with other jurisdictions to learn about their practices is an ongoing activity for Ontario Health. Ontario Health contributes as an active member on Health Canada's Federal, Provincial Territorial work in virtual care. As an example, Ontario Health is currently participating in a collaboration with the state of New South Wales, Australia to conduct a comparison of the two jurisdictions' approaches to virtual care. This approach as well as a potential third-party review of Ontario Health vis-a-vis other jurisdictions are being considered as options for targeted learning opportunities. Through Ontario Health's virtual visit verification program, Ontario Health will continue to gain insights into private sector best practices. Ontario Health's 2021-22 plan includes provision for consulting with private care providers in Ontario to learn more about their virtual care practices to help inform the expansion of virtual care in Ontario.

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care 2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario *Ministry of Health and Ontario Health*

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
4. (ii) [MOH-OH] Evaluate the feasibility of allowing physicians to bill for virtual-care services provided through multiple technologies outside of the Telemedicine Network (for example secure messaging, or phone calls) and implement changes that protect data security and privacy and enable the Ministry to monitor reasonableness of billings.	MOH The ministry in partnership with Ontario Health has established the Virtual Visit Solution Verification Process. The verification process accords providers with a choice of virtual care delivery options that both meets their needs and provincial standards for privacy, security and interoperability. Ontario's verification process provides a competitive landscape that is both responsive to market needs and ultimately improves the patient and provider experience. The private sector's involvement in the verification process is key to its success. The public list of verified solutions already reflects some of the larger vendors that account for significant market share in the Ontario virtual care solution marketplace, with more vendors expected to be reflected in the coming months. As part of our Digital First for Health Strategy, the ministry is committed to introducing multiple virtual care modalities and will continue to advance our virtual care modernization priorities through the appropriate implementation processes and channels. As the ministry witnesses greater adoption of virtual care, additional billing oversight mechanisms are being implemented to identify unreasonable billing structures, and educational resources to minimize inappropriate billing practices. Monitoring of reasonable billing will fall under the post payment billing audit framework for which in which the ministry has developed a high-level plan for to review post payment billing of virtual care services. Ontario Health Ontario Health supports the recommendation that physicians have the ability to use virtual care using multiple technologies including secure messaging and telephone. The 2019 evaluation of Ontario Health's Enhanced Access to Primary Care initiative which included both patient and provider initiated secure messaging demonstrated positive results from both the patient and provider perspective. Ontario Health has conducted a jurisdictional scan and developed and submitted to the Ministry of Health considerations regarding secure messaging billing. Ontario Health will work with the Ministry to support implementation of this recommendation.	MOH The high-level plan to review post payment billing of virtual care services will include the development of a framework that identifies red flags and risk as well as unreasonable or unusual trends within Ontario Virtual Care Program billing data. The ministry will work with relevant stakeholders in implementing the various requirements under each phase of the framework by Q4 2021-22.

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care
2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario
Ministry of Health and Ontario Health

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
5. To detect, deter, and reduce inappropriate billings for virtual-care services, we recommend that the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ontario Telemedicine Network within Ontario Health: 5.(i) develop a framework for monitoring virtual-care visit and billing data continuously as well as identifying red flags and risks that warrant further reviews;	MOH The ministry has developed a high-level plan to review post payment billing of virtual care services. The plan is compromised of four phases that includes the development of educational letters to remind physicians of appropriate billing and claims submissions; the development of criteria to identify red flags and risks as well as unreasonable or unusual trends within OVCP billing data; the development of processes for further review/ monitoring and following-up with cases of reoccurring inappropriate billing; the development of processes for disciplinary actions and/or recovery of funds; and an evaluation of the framework.	MOH The high-level plan to review post payment billing of virtual care services will include the development of a framework that identifies red flags and risk as well as unreasonable or unusual trends within Ontario Virtual Care Program billing data. The ministry will work with relevant stakeholders in implementing the various requirements under each phase of the high-level plan by Q4 2021-22.
5.(ii) conduct reviews when unreasonable or unusual trends are noted;	MOH The ministry has developed a high-level plan to review post payment billing of virtual care services. The plan is compromised of four phases that includes the development of educational letters to remind physicians of appropriate billing and claims submissions; the development of criteria to identify red flags and risks as well as unreasonable or unusual trends within OVCP billing data; the development of processes for further review/ monitoring and following-up with cases of reoccurring inappropriate billing; the development of processes for disciplinary actions and/or recovery of funds; and an evaluation of the framework.	MOH The high-level plan to review post payment billing of virtual care services will include the development of a framework that identifies red flags and risk as well as unreasonable or unusual trends within Ontario Virtual Care Program billing data. The ministry will work with relevant stakeholders in implementing the various requirements under each phase of the high-level plan by Q4 2021-22.

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care 2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario Ministry of Health and Ontario Health

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
5.(iii) collaborate with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to evaluate the quality of virtual care being provided by physicians with an unreasonable number of virtual-care visits;	MOH The ministry has developed a high-level plan to review post payment billing of virtual care services. The plan is compromised of four phases that includes the development of educational letters to remind physicians of appropriate billing and claims submissions; the development of criteria to identify red flags and risks as well as unreasonable or unusual trends within OVCP billing data; the development of processes for further review/ monitoring and following-up with cases of reoccurring inappropriate billing; the development of processes for disciplinary actions and/or recovery of funds; and an evaluation of the framework.	MOH The high-level plan to review post payment billing of virtual care services will include the development of a framework that identifies red flags and risk as well as unreasonable or unusual trends within Ontario Virtual Care Program billing data. The ministry will work with relevant stakeholders in implementing the various requirements under each phase of the high-level plan by Q4 2021-22.
5.(iv) • evaluate the effectiveness of the above actions taken in preventing, detecting, and reducing inappropriate virtual-care billings.	MOH The ministry has developed a high-level plan to review post payment billing of virtual care services. The plan is compromised of four phases that includes the development of educational letters to remind physicians of appropriate billing and claims submissions; the development of criteria to identify red flags and risks as well as unreasonable or unusual trends within OVCP billing data; the development of processes for further review/ monitoring and following-up with cases of reoccurring inappropriate billing; the development of processes for disciplinary actions and/or recovery of funds; and an evaluation of the framework.	MOH The high-level plan to review post payment billing of virtual care services will include the development of a framework that identifies red flags and risk as well as unreasonable or unusual trends within OVCP billing data. The ministry will work with relevant stakeholders in implementing the various requirements under each phase of the high-level plan by Q4 2021-22.
6. [MOH-OH] Work with stakeholders (such as the CPSO and the OMA) to collect information on the availability of virtual care provided outside of OH (OTN) and the usage of such services across the province.	Ontario Health Proactive and regular stakeholder engagement is an important element of Ontario Health's leadership in advancing virtual care in Ontario. Ontario Health is monitoring OHIP claims data to analyze the use of virtual care that has been billed through OHIP. Through this analysis Ontario Health can determine use of virtual care that has not been conducted through the Ontario Health platform. However, this analysis is limited to virtual care use by physicians who bill OHIP.	Ontario Health Ontario Health is in the process of developing a framework for capturing data from providers using vendor solutions that have been verified through the Ontario Health virtual visit verification program. The implementation of this framework is subject to a regulatory framework that would permit the collection and use of this data.

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care
2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario
Ministry of Health and Ontario Health

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
7. [MOH-OH] Ministry of Health collaborate with OH (OTN) and Telehealth Ontario to assess the feasibility of integrating services.	MOH and Ontario Health The Ministry of Health is leading the procurement for a Health Care Navigation Service (HCNS) to modernize and enhance the existing Telehealth Ontario service, which is currently an exclusively telephone-based service. The navigation service will introduce new, digitally based access channels and will ultimately provide client users with connections to virtual care services as part of the overall strategy. Ontario Health is fully supporting the Ministry with these procurement activities. A market sounding exercise with the vendor community was conducted prior to the start of formalized procurement activities, as was a 4-month user research stage that included consultations with patients and the general public to understand how a health system navigation tool could best support patient and caregiver needs. The HCNS Request for Bids (RFB) was issued February 8, 2021 and closed on March 29, 2021. The joint Ministry of Health and Ontario Health evaluation of Bids was initiated on March 31, 2021 and is ongoing.	MOH and Ontario Health The evaluation of bids is currently underway. Subject to the outcomes of the procurement process and once the Ministry has awarded a contract, the contract will be assigned to Ontario Health to assume leadership and day-to-day oversight of the vendor-led design and implementation of the navigation service, targeting a Q4 2021-22 go-live for the initial release.
8. [MOH-OH] Work with primary-care physicians and stakeholders to identify and implement solutions that enable all Ontarians to receive virtual primary-care services when requested by patients and deemed clinically appropriate by primary-care physicians.	Ontario Health Ontario Health is committed to continuing to work closely with primary care physicians and stakeholders to improve access to virtual care primary care services when requested by patients and clinically appropriate. Ontario Health, with the support of the Ministry has undertaken multiple initiatives with this objective. These include validating third party solutions for use by clinicians through the virtual visit vendor verification initiative, launching the Ontario Virtual Care Clinic in collaboration with Telehealth Ontario through the pandemic as well as planning, launching and evaluating the Enhanced Access to Primary Care/eVisit Primary Care initiative which allows patients to request care from their primary care clinicians using virtual means.	Ontario Health Ontario Health will continue to use the findings from program pilot evaluations and to work closely with primary care providers and stakeholders and in collaboration with the Ministry of Health to assess the degree to which these initiatives are meeting the needs of Ontarians and whether modifications to these services would better meet the needs. Ontario Health will also undertake work in collaboration with stakeholders in the area of clinical appropriateness.

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care
2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario
Ministry of Health and Ontario Health

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
9. To effectively estimate the financial savings resulting from virtual care, we recommend that the Ontario Telemedicine Network within Ontario Health, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health: 9.(i) [OH-MOH] Revisit cost-saving metrics to ensure realistic assumptions are used in calculating the savings (such as savings from patient travel costs).	Ontario Health Ontario Health has begun to review current assumptions and to review other's approaches. This included conducting a preliminary scan and reaching out to contacts in other jurisdictions. A plan has been developed to review indicator specifications with local experts.	Ontario Health Over the next 6 to 9-month period, Ontario Health will develop options for potential new metrics, based on renewed assumptions stakeholders and plan for implementation in the 2022-23 fiscal year.
9.(ii) [OH-MOH] Incorporate patients' Northern Health Travel Grant applications after receiving virtual care into its calculation methodology for savings.	Ontario Health Ontario Health has reviewed the recommendation and has begun to investigate alternative methodologies and to determine the requirements for these methodologies to be practically implemented.	Ontario Health Over the next 6 to 9 months, Ontario Health intends to complete the investigation, determine alternative methodologies and to review options/recommendations with the Ministry of Health.

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care 2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario Ministry of Health and Ontario Health

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
10. To effectively evaluate the impact of Telehealth Ontario services on patients and the health-care system, we recommend that the Ministry of Health: 10.(i) develop performance metrics to measure patient responses after receiving advice provided by Telehealth Ontario;	MOH The Ministry of Health is leading the procurement for a Health Care Navigation Service (HCNS) to modernize and enhance the existing Telehealth Ontario service, which is currently an exclusively telephone-based service. The navigation service will introduce new, digitally based access channels and will ultimately provide client users with connections to virtual care services as part of the overall strategy. Ontario Health is fully supporting the Ministry with these procurement activities. A market sounding exercise with the vendor community was conducted prior to the start of formalized procurement activities, as was a 4-month user research stage that included consultations with patients and the general public to understand how a health system navigation tool could best support patient and caregiver needs. The HCNS Request for Bids (RFB) was issued February 8, 2021 and closed on March 29, 2021. The joint Ministry of Health and Ontario Health evaluation of Bids was initiated on March 31, 2021 and is ongoing.	MOH As part of establishing the Health Care Navigation Service (HCNS), The ministry will develop key performance metrics and a benefits realization plan to measure patient responses after receiving advice provided through both the telephone and digitally based access channels (e.g., web and mobile-based services).
10(ii) • continuously assess the effectiveness of Telehealth Ontario services on an annual basis using follow-up surveys of patients.	MOH The Ministry of Health is leading the procurement for a Health Care Navigation Service (HCNS) to modernize and enhance the existing Telehealth Ontario service, which is currently an exclusively telephone-based service. The navigation service will introduce new, digitally based access channels and will ultimately provide client users with connections to virtual care services as part of the overall strategy. Ontario Health is fully supporting the Ministry with these procurement activities. A market sounding exercise with the vendor community was conducted prior to the start of formalized procurement activities, as was a 4-month user research stage that included consultations with patients and the general public to understand how a health system navigation tool could best support patient and caregiver needs. The HCNS Request for Bids (RFB) was issued February 8, 2021 and closed on March 29, 2021. The joint Ministry of Health and Ontario Health evaluation of Bids was initiated on March 31, 2021 and is ongoing.	MOH As part of the implementation of the Health Care Navigation Service the ministry will, continuously assess the effectiveness of the navigation service on an annual basis through client user surveys to follow-up on satisfaction and experience that will help to guide improvements to the service over time.

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care
2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario
Ministry of Health and Ontario Health

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
11. [OH-MOH] OH in collaboration with the MOH work with experts in the area of patient health outcomes and virtual care to identify and implement metrics that have proven successful in other jurisdictions and/or private virtual-care providers for measuring and evaluating patient and health-care system outcomes.	Ontario Health Ontario Health has conducted an initial on-line scan and has met with other jurisdictions to begin to investigate metrics being used elsewhere. As the cancer system already uses a standardized, computerized approach to measuring patient health outcomes, technical requirements for enhancing the system to include potential virtual care measures have been developed. MOH The Ministry and the Centre for Digital Health Evaluation completed a comprehensive evaluation of virtual care during the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of that evaluation administrative data for two chronic disease patient populations was segmented by high vs. low virtual care use and hospitalizations, emergency room visits, diagnostic tests, labs and primary care visits were tracked as surrogate measures for patient outcomes. Reductions were observed across all categories, with the exception of primary care visits for individuals with chronic psychotic disorder, which increased for high virtual care users. These increase in primary care visits was paired with a significant decreased in emergency room utilization, suggesting that increased access to primary care (likely virtual) was offset by a decrease in care delivered in more costly settings (e.g. ER).	Ontario Health Ontario Health intends to continue to seek information on the ways in which others are successfully measuring and evaluating patient and health system outcomes and will develop a plan for implementation of new measures in 2022-23. MOH The ministry will be using the findings from the evaluation report led by Centre for Digital Health Evaluation's on Virtual Care adoption during COVID to inform its approach to virtual health care policy in a number of areas, including incorporating a stronger health equity lens, advancing the use of various virtual care modalities across the health care system and continuing to support virtual care adoption in primary care settings.

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care 2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario Ministry of Health and Ontario Health

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
12 To evaluate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on virtual care availability and usage in Ontario and apply lessons learned for decision-making going forward, we recommend that the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ontario Telemedicine Network within Ontario Health: 12.(i) [MOH-OH] Conduct a comprehensive analysis of virtual care usage and cost during the pandemic and decide whether the temporary changes (such as new billing codes) should be made permanent.	MOH The ministry has commissioned multiple evaluations of virtual care to inform our modernization activities. Most recently, the completion of a comprehensive evaluation of virtual care adoption during COVID and its impact ranging on topics related to health equity and patient health outcomes has been completed. Evaluation on innovative virtual care models, funding to support the provincial response to COVID is also underway, this includes evaluation of virtual urgent care, virtual surgical transitions and remote patient monitoring models implemented to identify how virtual care support integrated health care service delivery and changes to physician remuneration for virtual services. Ontario Health Ontario Health is actively monitoring the utilization of Ontario Health provided virtual care solutions over the course of the pandemic.	MOH The ministry is working with Ontario Health in conducting ongoing analysis on usage and costs during the pandemic to ensure lessons learned are applied to future decision making.
12.(ii) [MOH-OH] Engage health-care providers, both who had and had not previously used virtual care in their practice before the pandemic, to obtain feedback on their experience of offering virtual care during the pandemic.	Ontario Health Engagement of providers who are new to incorporating virtual care in their practises is central to the ongoing development of Ontario Health's advancement of virtual care in the Province. Ontario Health has captured feedback from those who previously used Ontario Health services as well as from those who are new to Ontario Health services, through multiple channels, web-based 'contact us' feedback, feedback from providers calling the service desk, through customer satisfaction surveys and targeted interviews. Ontario Health will work with the Ministry to determine how best to approach soliciting feedback from those who had not used virtual care prior to the pandemic and who may have chosen to use other means (e.g., telephone) during the course of the pandemic to provide care virtually.	Ontario Health Health provider organizations receiving funds through the Virtual Care Secretariat identified priority initiatives to support the COVID-19 response (Urgent Care, Surgical Transitions, Remote Patient Monitoring and Home and Community Care) have and will continue to provide Ontario Health with feedback and utilization data that will yield insight into the experience of those who may not have previously used virtual care. A third party will be retained in 2021-22 to evaluate the outcome of high priority funded virtual models of care including but not limited to surgical transitions and remote patient monitoring.

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care 2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario Ministry of Health and Ontario Health

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
12.(iii) [MOH-OH] Collect feedback from patients across the province on their experience of using virtual care during the pandemic to gather and incorporate patient views into future decisions related to providing and funding virtual care tools.	Ontario Health Gaining further insight into the patient experience and their preferences is essential to decision making regarding future virtual care directions. Ontario Health's Patient and Family Advisory Group helped inform Ontario Health's virtual care approach as part of COVID-19 Response Planning. This group has provided insights on their experiences during the pandemic and have been called upon to provide input into a proposed on-line appointment booking standard to assist Ontario Health in the development of the standard. Experiences of those who used virtual care for school-based mental health consultations have been collected. Patient and Family advisors have been recruited to participate as evaluators for the Health Care Navigation Service proposals. Patient and Family Advisor Town Halls were conducted with patients using virtual care in the cancer system and Patient and Family Advisors actively participated in the ongoing development of virtual care oncology guidelines which will be published in the late spring/early summer.	Ontario Health Ontario Health is fully committed to continuing to actively incorporate patient views and person-centred care in the work of the Agency including collecting feedback on virtual care during the pandemic and applying it to virtual care initiatives.
12.(iv) [MOH-OH] develop performance metrics for measuring the experience of both health-care providers and patients with virtual care during the pandemic and identifying areas for improvements going forward under pandemic and non-pandemic circumstances.	Ontario Health Ontario Health continuously monitors the virtual care experience of both health care providers and patients to identify areas for improvement. Ontario Health builds experience and satisfaction measurement into virtual care offerings and programs. As one example, a virtual care patient experience measure for oncology patients was built into an Ontario Health virtual visit survey offered at the end of the patient's virtual appointment during the pandemic. Ontario Health continues to collect provider and patient experience feedback and include it in the 'voice of the customer' and the improvement prioritization process. MOH The ministry leads policy and strategy and works with Ontario Health to establish performance management frameworks to identify areas for improvement.	Ontario Health Ontario Health will continue to explore expansion of electronic patient reported measures beyond the cancer system. Ontario Health. Ontario Health's 2021-22 plans include the development of performance metrics to measure the experience of both health care providers and patients with a view to monitoring these metrics to inform areas for improvement. MOH The ministry considers continuous improvement of virtual care an ongoing activity.

Summary Status Table in Response to the Report of the Auditor General of Ontario

Value-for-Money Audit: Virtual Care: Use of Communication Technologies for Patient Care 2020 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario Ministry of Health and Ontario Health

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
13 To evaluate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on calls to Telehealth Ontario and apply lessons learned to decision-making going forward, we recommend that the Ministry of Health: 13(i) continue analyzing Telehealth Ontario call volumes and wait times to ensure that adequate capacity and resources will be available if Ontario faces subsequent waves of COVID-19;	MOH The Ministry of Health is leading the procurement for a Health Care Navigation Service (HCNS) to modernize and enhance the existing Telehealth Ontario service, which is currently an exclusively telephone-based service. The navigation service will introduce new, digitally based access channels and will ultimately provide client users with connections to virtual care services as part of the overall strategy. Ontario Health is fully supporting the Ministry with these procurement activities. A market sounding exercise with the vendor community was conducted prior to the start of formalized procurement activities, as was a 4-month user research stage that included consultations with patients and the general public to understand how a health system navigation tool could best support patient and caregiver needs. The HCNS Request for Bids (RFB) was issued February 8, 2021 and closed on March 29, 2021. The joint Ministry of Health and Ontario Health evaluation of Bids was initiated on March 31, 2021 and is ongoing.	MOH The ministry is currently nearing the final stages of a multi-stage procurement process to establish a provincial Health Care Navigation Service. The navigation service will encompass both telephone and digitally based options for all Ontarians to access health information, advice, and initial triage to become connected to publicly funded health care services, including connections to virtual care options (e.g., appointments / visits) and other health system supports.
13(ii) explore options or solutions (such as creating a separate phone number for calls related to COVID-19) that help distinguish the nature of call and reduce wait times for non-COVID-19 calls going forward in response to potential subsequent waves of COVID-19.	MOH The Ministry of Health is leading the procurement for a Health Care Navigation Service (HCNS) to modernize and enhance the existing Telehealth Ontario service, which is currently an exclusively telephone-based service. The navigation service will introduce new, digitally based access channels and will ultimately provide client users with connections to virtual care services as part of the overall strategy. Ontario Health is fully supporting the Ministry with these procurement activities. A market sounding exercise with the vendor community was conducted prior to the start of formalized procurement activities, as was a 4-month user research stage that included consultations with patients and the general public to understand how a health system navigation tool could best support patient and caregiver needs. The HCNS Request for Bids (RFB) was issued February 8, 2021 and closed on March 29, 2021. The joint Ministry of Health and Ontario Health evaluation of Bids was initiated on March 31, 2021 and is ongoing.	MOH The ministry is currently nearing the final stages of a multi-stage procurement process to establish a provincial Health Care Navigation Service. The navigation service will encompass both telephone and digitally based options for all Ontarians to access health information, advice, and initial triage to become connected to publicly funded health care services, including connections to virtual care options (e.g., appointments / visits) and other health system supports.