



Invest in communications technology to improve access to specialty care

WHY IT MATTERS

ISSUE

People across Canada, especially those in rural and remote and Indigenous communities, face challenges in accessing healthcare, including specialty medicine. Technology can be leveraged to improve the ability of providers to offer services to people in these communities, using platforms such as e-consultation, e-referral and telemedicine.

REQUEST

All parties must commit to investing a minimum of \$5 billion over the next 10 years to build a connected country. Communications technology, especially for those in rural and remote communities, can improve access to specialty care such as through telemedicine, e-Consultation, e-Referral and fully-deployed electronic health records.

The Evidence

- 1 in 6 Canadians live in rural and remote communities, compared to 2.3% of specialist physicians in those communities.
- Patients are often displaced and forced to bear significant costs to seek care outside of their communities.
- For Indigenous people, leaving their communities introduces the added challenge of receiving care away from family and cultural supports, which results in poorer health outcomes.

The Impact

- Remote electronic access has been shown to reduce specialist visits, shorten wait times, and reduce medical travel and the associated costs.
- Electronic Health Records - which require reliable internet connections - can connect caregivers, enhance continuity of care, and increase engagement and agency of patients.
- A connected country facilitates the delivery of specialty medicine to those who would not otherwise have access, including populations in need such as Indigenous peoples and those living in rural and remote communities.

FAQs

How much will it cost?

To help every Canadian access high-speed internet at minimum speeds of 50/10 Mbps, Budget 2019 proposed a new, coordinated plan that would deliver \$5 billion to \$6 billion in investments in rural broadband over the next 10 years to help build a fully connected Canada—including rural, remote and northern communities.

In Budget 2019, the Federal Government announced its commitment to set a national target, in which 95 per cent of Canadian homes and businesses will have access to internet speeds of at least 50/10 Mbps by 2026 and 100 per cent by 2030, no matter where they are located in the country. This is in keeping with the broadband internet speed objective set by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) for Canadian households and businesses across Canada.

How does technology improve health and access to specialty medicine?

New medical services, like eConsultation, eReferral and telemedicine connect rural primary care providers and patients to specialists who are situated in large urban centres. These new services use internet and telecommunications technologies to exchange information and provide high definition virtual care to patients over large distances. Remote electronic access offers significant gains in terms of both the timeliness and cost-effectiveness of specialized care delivery. For example, eConsultation can reduce specialist visits, shorten wait times. Similarly, telemedicine has been shown to reduce the need for medical related travel, as well as the associated cost to patients. These new technology-enabled medical services represent a huge step forward in bringing specialty care to patients, rather than bringing patients to specialty care.

Where should we start?

- rural and remote/Indigenous communities, focusing on the most remote communities which are not currently served by local/regional services



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