



Excellence in  
Stroke Care

# Southwestern Ontario Stroke Network Regional Virtual Care Guidelines Supporting Best Practice Stroke Care

**Background:** The Southwestern Ontario Stroke Network conducted an environmental scan of virtual care programs, providers and patients/clients experience in 2021. Recommendations to support the delivery of quality virtual stroke care were derived from that project. (Appendix A)

**Purpose:** The following Regional Guidelines are intended to support the implementation of organizational specific policies and procedures related to the provision of best practice virtual stroke care. SWOSN recommends alignment and adoption of these guidelines in order to standardize the approach of virtual health care services within the region.

**Definition:** Several definitions of virtual care have been reported in the literature but for the purpose of these guidelines, virtual care is defined as:

*"any interaction between patients and/or members of their circle of care, occurring remotely, using any forms of communication and information technologies, with the aim of facilitating and maximizing the quality and effectiveness of patient care."*

*(Canadian Medical Association, 2022)*

## **Special Considerations:**

- health care providers are expected to follow their respective college guidelines in the delivery of virtual care
- virtual visits have unique risks that differ from in-person care and so it is important to ensure organizations are compliant with the Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA)

When creating specific virtual care policies and procedures, SWOSN recommends organizations refer to the following for fulsome recommendations guiding virtual care:

- [Canadian Stroke Best Practices Virtual Stroke Care Implementation Toolkit \(Update 2022\)](#) (Heart & Stroke Canada, 2022)
- Health Standards Organization (HSO) Virtual Health Standards (HSO, 2018)
- [Providing safe and high-quality virtual care: A guide for new and experienced users - Clinician Change Virtual Care Toolkit \(May 2022\)](#) (Healthcare Excellence Canada 2022)

The guidelines outlined here are a minimum for programs providing stroke care within the Southwestern Ontario Stroke Network and will support organizations to ensure quality and safety when providing virtual stroke services.

### **Regional Guidelines:**

1. Organizations should consider a virtual hybrid model of care in order to provide continuity of care, avoid service disruptions and to offer service choice and flexibility to patients/clients and families.
2. When creating a virtual care hybrid delivery model, policies and procedures, organizations should first consider patient choice, suitability and safety.
3. Organizations should include patients/clients and their families in the design, delivery and evaluation of virtual health services.
4. Patient/Client inclusion/exclusion criteria should be created to determine appropriateness of providing virtual services. (HSO, 2018, 4.1.1)
5. Organizations should assist patients/clients to prepare for their visit by providing access to resources to facilitate successful participation, such as the Heart and Stroke Virtual Healthcare Checklist Infographic. (Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, 2022)
6. Organizations should have a specific point of contact to address virtual care concerns. Staff and clients should be made aware of who they can contact if they have any issues.
7. Organizations should dedicate sufficient resources to ensure staff have access to appropriate tools, both hardware and software, to support the provision of best practice virtual visits, including sufficient connectivity and bandwidth to ensure proper resolution.
8. Organizations should ensure staff providing virtual care receive proper training and clerical support in order to provide high quality virtual health care.
9. To support successful transitions for patients/clients along the stroke continuum, organizations should ensure there is handover of client preference, suitability and capacity for virtual care services.
10. When deciding what therapies/visit types are most conducive to virtual care, it is recommended that organizations refer their staff to Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada's Canadian Stroke Best Practices Virtual Stroke Care Implementation Toolkit and their Virtual Care Decision Framework and Pathway (links in Appendix B).

11. Organizations should ensure proper documentation of virtual visits are kept in order to support an evaluation strategy and to ensure services are meeting the needs of patients/clients and families.
12. Organizations should establish a process for data collection and for monitoring quality of care, patient satisfaction and outcomes, as well as healthcare provider experience, and effectiveness of tools being utilized.
13. Organizations should have an evaluation strategy to determine virtual care effectiveness and efficiencies and identify opportunities for improvement in delivery of service. Domains to be considered when planning for evaluation should include the following Heart and Stroke Foundation recommendations from the Canadian Stroke Best Practices Virtual Stroke Care Implementation Toolkit: Update 2022 (link in Appendix B):

- Accessibility
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- System Integration and Continuity
- Patient Experience
- Provider Experience
- Technical efficiency and responsiveness

(Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, 2022)

14. Organizations should have an adverse events management plan to respond to patient-safety incidents in order to prevent recurrence and make improvements.
15. Organizations should ensure Quality Improvement opportunities are identified and carried out in collaboration with patients/clients.
16. Organizations should focus on parity of access to virtual care, addressing barriers to equity and access. It is recommended that you refer to: Providing safe and high-quality virtual care: A guide for new and experienced users -Clinician Change Virtual Care Toolkit (link in Appendix B).
17. Organizations are encouraged to work in collaboration with Regional Stroke partners to ensure a quality standardized approach across the region.
18. Organizations should complete client satisfactions surveys following the implementation of virtual care policies and communicate findings regionally as knowledge sharing opportunities.

# Appendix A

Virtual Care Recommendations arising from the Virtual Care Environmental Scan Regional Excellence and Innovation Project completed in 2022 by the Southwestern Ontario Stroke Network

When developing a model of virtual care services, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Adoption of a virtual hybrid service delivery model that supports patient choice and prioritizes patient suitability and safety (e.g., vision, hearing and cognitive deficits, contraindications).
2. Development of organization specific virtual care goals, service policies and procedures.
3. Consider the creation of a virtual care role/department to facilitate the provision of best practice virtual care.
4. Investment in technology, both hardware and software, for secure access and effective tools for use by both staff and clients.
5. Provision of technical support and training for frontline staff and clients on the video platforms, applications and virtual tools.
6. Dedicated/budgeted time for additional clerical support for scheduling and preparation for virtual services.
7. Creation of stroke best practice assessment and treatment guidelines that identify which services are suitable for a virtual visit.
8. Completion of a cost/benefit analysis to determine cost savings/equivalency.
9. Identification of a minimum data set for virtual care services to evaluate its use and outcomes.
10. Ongoing development of resources and tools to support delivery of virtual services.

# Appendix B

## References & Recommended Resources

Canadian Medical Association. (2022). [Virtual Care in Canada: Progress and Potential](#) .

Healthcare Excellence Canada. (2022). [Providing safe and high-quality virtual care: A guide for new and experienced users - Clinician Change Virtual Care Toolkit \(May 2022\)](#)

Health Standards Organization (HSO). (2018). Health Standards Organization Virtual Health Standards. Retrieved from: [Virtual Health - HSO Health Standards Organization](#) (free)

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. (2022). Canadian Stroke Best Practices [Canadian Stroke Best Practices Virtual Stroke Care Implementation Toolkit: Update 2022](#).

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. (2021). [Comprehensive Virtual Care Decision Pathway](#).

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. (2021). [Virtual Care Decision Framework](#).

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. (2022). [Virtual Healthcare Checklist Infographic](#)

Southwestern Ontario Stroke Network. (2022). Environmental Scan of Virtual Care Services for Stroke in Southwestern Ontario. Available from SWOSN upon request