

# Virtual Care Options for the Primary Health Care System in NS during COVID-19



## *Virtual care solutions are available to ensure the safety of the patient, providers, and staff.*

As part of the system response to COVID-19, new options are being made available to support primary care providers and other NSHA Primary Health Care programs and services to use virtual care in order to be able to deliver care to patients in the most effective and safe way possible. This document will outline what these options are for you, so you can make the best decision for your practice/team/clinic.



## *Engage with patients in a more interactive, safe way*

Virtual care, whether provided through online tools or telephone, is an important way for primary care providers, including family physicians and nurse practitioners, and team members, to reduce the risk of disease spread as it can be reliably used as an alternative to in-person appointments. It can also be a mechanism to offer other programs and services, such as diabetes care or to support ongoing management of other chronic conditions and wellness promotion activities. Health care providers should use their professional judgment to determine whether an in-person or virtual appointment is appropriate in each case. Patients should be provided the opportunity for in-person visits when needed. A recent [Department of Family Practice Update](#) includes tips to ensure in-person visits can be provided when necessary.



## *What options are available?*

To help support patient care and health care providers in the current COVID-19 pandemic, there are a few virtual care options available. The below table provides further details, including how to sign up for the options. **Doctors Nova Scotia has developed a great [bulletin](#) that describes each option in more detail.**

Virtual Care Options Available for Providers During the COVID-19 Pandemic	
<b>Telehealth Zoom</b>	<p>Telehealth Zoom has been approved as a virtual care platform for use on an <b>interim</b> basis for all health care providers (physicians, NPs, allied health professionals, and staff). The Department of Health and Wellness will provide funding for licensing for a <u>1 year period</u>. After this time, providers will have to assume the costs if you want to maintain the service. Telehealth Zoom is a secure, web-based virtual care video conferencing platform that has been adopted in other parts of Canada. For more information, visit <a href="#">NSHA's website</a> or <a href="http://www.zoom.us">www.zoom.us</a>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>For physicians:</b> For Telehealth Zoom account requests, please complete the <a href="#">Telehealth Zoom Request Form</a>, save as and submit by email to <a href="mailto:VirtualCare@nshealth.ca">VirtualCare@nshealth.ca</a>.</li> <li>➤ <b>For NSHA PHC staff:</b> Please discuss with your PHC Manager/Lead prior to submitting a request using the above process (<a href="#">Telehealth Zoom Request Form</a>, save as and submit to <a href="mailto:VirtualCare@nshealth.ca">VirtualCare@nshealth.ca</a>)</li> </ul>
<b>Options Offered by EMR Vendors</b>	<p>EMR Vendors are also offering options that can be acquired at cost. For example, QHR Accuro offers Medeo for virtual visits and is integrated with Accuro. Telus is also putting forward new products.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>For physicians:</b> We encourage you to reach out to your EMR vendor to discuss options.</li> <li>➤ <b>For NSHA PHC staff/turn-key practices:</b> For NSHA staff / turn-key practices who currently are using Accuro, Medeo is approved to move forward. Please discuss with your PHC Manager/Lead if Medeo is the best option for your team. NSHA PHC requests for Medeo should be submitted through the existing <a href="#">PHC SharePoint EMR request process</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>Telephone</b>	<p>If adopting a new technology is not the right fit for you / your team at this time, the phone can be optimized to limit the number of in-person visits and many of you have already moved to offering a high proportion of care / services by phone already. For advice on telephone consultations, see "Resources" section on page 2.</p>



### What supports are available?

We understand virtual care may be brand new to you. It's relatively new for us too and we are working to ensure that new resources and guides are available on [NSHA's Virtual Care Website](#) to support you and your team in **adopting** the technology. NSHA's resources are mainly focused on Zoom Health at this time. There are resources on NSHA's website available for both patients and health care providers. See a full list of resources below.

To further understand how we can **optimize** the technology across settings and in different types of clinical environments in primary health care, we are setting up two clinical working groups. Please email the working group lead if you are interesting in advising on the implementation and sharing of best practice ideas. These are time-limited groups to support implementation and we will look at the best structure to engage in the sharing of ideas and best practices over time.

- Family Practice Virtual Care Clinical Advisory Group, led by Dr. Rick Gibson ([Rick.Gibson@nshealth.ca](mailto:Rick.Gibson@nshealth.ca))
- Chronic Disease Management and Wellness Virtual Care Clinical Advisory Group, led by Lindsay Sutherland ([Lindsay.Sutherland@nshealth.ca](mailto:Lindsay.Sutherland@nshealth.ca))

### Resources:

- Zoom Health: [NSHA's Virtual Care Website](#) has how-to guides, privacy guidelines, communication templates, and other materials related to virtual care
- Medeo Resources: <https://medeohealth.com/>
- Telus Health: <https://www.telus.com/en/health>
- [Virtual Appointment Practice Guidelines](#)
- [Virtual Visit Implementation Guide](#)
- Reach out to your colleagues who may have experience using virtual care
- Continue to read the updates that come out from NSHA and other partners for additional resources (Department of Family Practice Update, Update from the VP Medicine's Office, DNS, etc).



You will need to make a **practice-by-practice or team-by-team decision** to determine if this is the right time for you to adopt a new virtual tool. Upfront effort will be required to learn the technology – both for health care providers and administrative support staff – and to discuss how you will adapt your practice to integrate technology. There may be changes required for how you book appointments, organize your day, and communicate with your team members and patients. As well, you will need to consider how you will provide information to your patients for using the technology. Staff in PHC programs and services (such as diabetes centres, etc) are asked to bring this to your Health Services Manager or Lead for further discussion about using the tool and if it is the right fit for your clinic setting.

**NOTE:** We are recommending that any primary care providers (FPs, NPs) who are self-isolating sign up in order to ensure continuity of care to your practice. A recent [Department of Family Practice Update](#) (see section: Working with Colleagues) includes some additional tips to ensure in-person visits can be provided when necessary.