

# Digital Health—A New Horizon for Home and Community Care

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Health care leaders around the world are increasingly identifying ways in which new information and communication technologies—digital health—can improve people's lives and at the same time improve efficiencies and reduce the costs of health care.

Technological advancements have created a wide range of new options for a transformative shift in the way we think about and address health and care. Technologies such as telemonitoring applications, mobile phones, web-based platforms and smart homes are facilitating the shift of care from institutional and professional settings to individuals' homes. Through digital health, health care consumers can be more engaged in the self-management of their conditions and carers are empowered with information and resources.

As new technologies become more pervasive throughout society, it's no surprise that their potential for changing the health landscape is capturing the eyes and ears of decision-makers at many different policy and programmatic levels.

## **THE CHALLENGE IS TO GET THERE FROM HERE**

Transformation can only occur when new technology is fully embraced in the day-to-day lives of patients and their families. This transformation also requires health care providers to fully integrate technology in their care processes, as well as the embedment of cost and resource consideration into a sustainable model that has broad application by policy-makers and funders. Transformation happens when these same stakeholders can see, through an evidence-informed lens, the benefits of technologies in delivering care compared to the current funding environment. These benefits include health benefits, economic benefits, as well as ways in which technologies can contribute to the further evolution of a fully developed integrated system of care.

**TRANSFORMATION  
ALSO REQUIRES HEALTH  
CARE PROVIDERS TO  
FULLY INTEGRATE  
TECHNOLOGY IN THEIR  
CARE PROCESSES**

In addressing this challenge, we must “peel back the layers of the onion” and evaluate a number of key elements when exploring technology-enabled home care.

1

The first is **awareness and assessment of technology-based innovations**.

- How do, or will, the decision-makers at various policy and operational levels responsible for providing care learn about what is technologically possible?
- How will they know what will work in their respective organizational, spatial and jurisdictional contexts?
- If smart homes are the way of the future, for example, who will pay for their introduction?

The second consideration is **scalability**.

2

- Assuming a pilot initiative is successful, how will it be generalized beyond the pilot site(s)?
- What will be the weight of evidence required for decision-makers to invest heavily in the roll-out of a new technology-based way of providing care?
- What technologies should be adopted, knowing that there are and will be many products to choose from in the marketplace?

3

This leads to the third consideration, which is the concept of **sustainability**.

- Who will fund the longer term roll-out of innovations across a system?
- Will individuals—the general public—have to pay for such a transformation or will such changes remain in the purview of governments?
- What will be the role of the private sector in all of this, especially as businesses essentially compete with one another to obtain market share for their technologies?

New technologies can enable significant and widespread improvements in improving health outcomes of our frail and vulnerable populations, while supporting their independence and dignity. But, it requires patients, health care leaders, clinicians and decision-makers at all levels to embrace and act upon the opportunities that are possible.

**The CHCA is committed to being a part of this exciting challenge.**

ABOUT THE CANADIAN HOME CARE ASSOCIATION

**Working together to improve integrated community-based care**

The Canadian Home Care Association (CHCA) is a national non-profit membership association dedicated to advancing excellence in home and community care. Through our diverse membership base, the CHCA represents public and private organizations who fund, manage and provide services and products in the home and community sector. Our vision is an integrated health and social care system that provides seamless patient- and family-centred care that is accessible, accountable, evidence-informed and sustainable.