



The Honourable Mark Holland, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Health – House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A0A6  
via email: [hcminister.ministresc@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:hcminister.ministresc@hc-sc.gc.ca)

May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024

RE: Virtual Care in Canada

Dear Minister Holland,

Benefits Alliance is a not-for-profit organization representing benefit plan advisors and plan sponsors nationally. Our focus is in the area's of education, collaboration and advocacy. Benefits Alliance was also the founding member of the Smart Health Benefits Coalition currently engaged in public discussion around the future of pharmacare.

We are reaching out to you regarding ongoing discussions with your office and provincial health bodies on the matter of virtual care in Canada.

Canadian businesses and organizations have chosen to sponsor benefits plans that offer competitive health/dental programs for their employees to help support overall health and wellness in their workforce and their families. We believe that virtual care is an integral part of this offering. According to the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association (CLHIA) approximately 10million Canadians currently have access to employer funded virtual care. We can conclude that this is highly prevalent in our clients across the country.

As our organization is the "boots on the ground" working with employers across the country, our feedback indicates that these services are highly rated and beneficial to promoting a healthy workforce, while also reducing the strain on public health as employees can get quick access (often after hours) and not put a burden on walk in or family physician services.

Here is what our Benefits Alliance members would like to say about the value of virtual care with their clients:

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## Testimonial

“ The **accessibility of virtual healthcare** has been a **game-changer**. Whether it's routine check-ups, managing chronic conditions, or addressing minor health concerns, virtual consultations have become a seamless and stress-free experience. Connecting with healthcare professionals from the comfort of your home or work has **saved valuable time** for the employee (their dependents) and employer. Also eliminated barriers that may have previously deterred from seeking timely medical attention.

Virtual healthcare has **empowered** everyone to take a **proactive role in managing their health**. The convenience of virtual appointments encourages prompt attention to health concerns, leading to **early detection and prevention of potential issues**. Ongoing communication with healthcare professionals through secure online platforms enables a **collaborative and personalized approach** to the healthcare journey.



**Bill Zolis**

Senior Employee Benefits Consultant



Ajax, Ontario

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## Testimonial

“ There are “tools” in your benefits plan, like **Employee Family Assistance Plans, Virtual Healthcare** and Second Opinion services that maybe don't have high utilization. We may want to purge those tools that go “untouched” [...]. We can't see value and appreciate things until we **actually use** them. Simple as that. **Employees only need to use a tool ONCE! AND, if they try it once, it's highly likely they will use it again.**

We had Virtual Healthcare in our benefits plan for quite a while before I finally tried it. **Time Saved. Problem Solved. Peace of Mind.**

I was a champion for the service after ONE time. I have used our Virtual Healthcare service many times since.

Even [my partner] has used it! After a hard slash to the shin during a “shinny” hockey game, his ankle and foot were very swollen, and he had a nasty lump. We were travelling on an airplane the next day. I was worried. Tim would NOT have gone to see a doctor. He did finally agree to use our Virtual Healthcare service (I might have encouraged him a little). **After 10-minute call with a doctor, he was happy to report to me. He was right – I had nothing to worry about.**



**Andrea Hansen**



*Benefits Advisor, educator, writer and the creator of the Sutton Employee Engagement Wheel at Sutton Benefits and Pension. Andrea specializes in group benefits and building total rewards strategies for community-minded businesses.*

# Testimonial



We have many clients who have implemented virtual care services with the reasons for doing so being varied;

- Recognition that a **significant number employees do not have a primary care physician**;
  - While all regions of Canada have this issue, in **less populated areas** it can be particularly acute and impact organization's' ability to attract and retain employees;
- Alternate, **in-person** options (ie. Walk in clinics) can be very **time consuming** and therefore inefficient;
- The feedback from employees is that **these services are greatly appreciated and increasingly utilized**.

While one argument against such services is that they are contributing to the primary physician shortage due to those resources being diverted to supporting these services, I would suggest that the opposite is true in that these platforms provide an efficient way for available physicians to see patients in areas other than their immediate location.



**Todd Stephen**

Vice President, Benefits and Pension



We very much support your continued work to make positive improvements to the public health system, though we feel that our unique experience has shown that employer paid virtual care offerings are making a very positive impacts with our clients and their employees. We do believe that virtual care has a place with our clients as a part of a comprehensive employee benefits offering and not on an individual pay for use basis. We would welcome participating in further discussions with Health Canada and Provincial/Territorial bodies to help provide further insight into the patient experience on the ground.

**Carolyn Eagan**

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