



College of
**HEALTH AND CARE
PROFESSIONALS OF BC**

Virtual Care Guide

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Acknowledgement



This document has been adapted to suit the British Columbia physical therapy regulatory context, with thanks and with permission from Physiotherapy Alberta College and Association, and the College of Physiotherapists of Manitoba.



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Introduction



When physical therapists engage in the provision of virtual care services, they are expected to comply with all [CHCPBC regulatory requirements, standards and legislation](#) and to deliver physical therapy services that meet the same expectations for quality, competent care as services delivered in person.

This resource was created to enable physical therapists engaging in technology-mediated practice, whether clients are within a single provincial jurisdiction or across jurisdictional borders, to do so safely and effectively. It focuses on how to deliver physical therapy services virtually in adherence with [CHCPBC regulations, legislation and practice standards](#), including the [Standard of Practice: Virtual Care](#).

There are many external resources available that provide guidance with respect to the practical (rather than regulatory) aspects of delivering care in this way. Some of these are provided in the [Practice Resources section on the College's website](#).

The remote delivery of physical therapy services using technology is becoming increasingly prevalent. The use of technology enables increased access to physical therapy services during the COVID-19 pandemic, and at all times for clients living in rural and remote areas.

Remote delivery allows for access to physical therapists by those clients whose needs are well-served remotely by removing some barriers associated with in-person care (for example those with mobility, transportation, childcare or other barriers). Clients can access physical therapists with unique competencies, regardless of where the client or physical therapist is physically located (in 2014, 90% of physical therapists were employed in urban areas, whereas only 3.6% of Canada's geography is urban¹).

Additionally, there are challenges in recruiting physical therapists and other health professionals to work in rural and remote areas. The use of telerehabilitation provides an innovative means to address this disparity.

Broadly speaking, virtual care (also known as telerehabilitation and a subset of telehealth) relates to the services delivered by a number of rehabilitation disciplines, including physical therapy, through any form of technology (including but not restricted to videoconferencing, email, apps, web-based communication, wearable technology and telephone) as an alternative to face-to-face interventions. It encompasses all aspects of client care including the client interview, physical assessment and diagnosis, treatment, maintenance activities, education, and training. This use of electronically-mediated communication to deliver health services can occur over large or small distances or across jurisdictional borders².

¹ Sutherland, G. (2017). The Market Profile of Physiotherapists in Canada. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada. Retrieved from https://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/aed30c87-4fbb-45c9-b0c5-806b23ec75e5/8695_Profile-of-Physiotherapists-in-Canada_BR.pdf

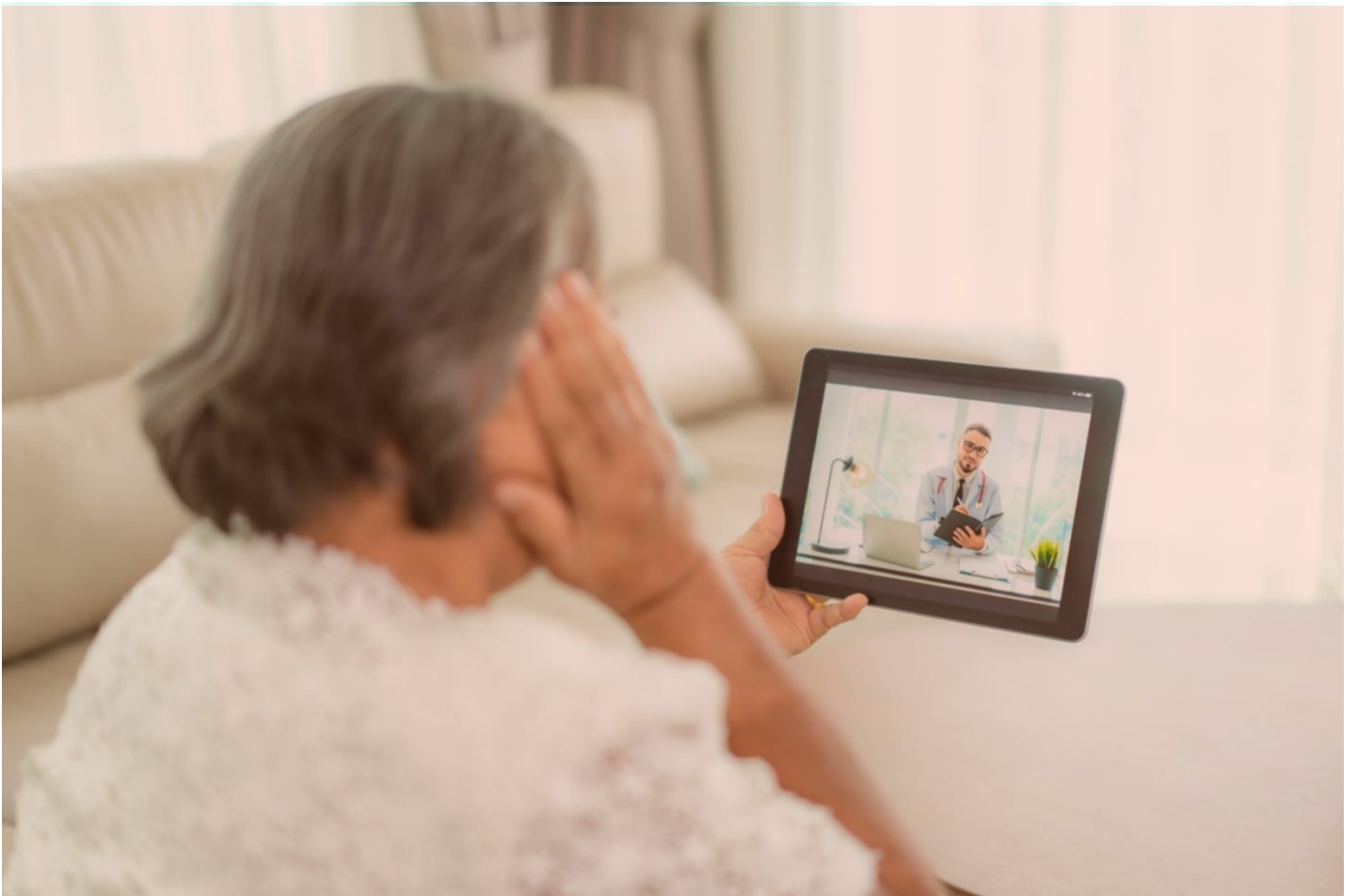
² Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (2015). Telehealth in Physical Therapy: Policy recommendations for appropriate regulation. Retrieved from <https://www.fsbpt.org/Portals/0/documents/free-resources/TelehealthInPhysicalTherapy2015.pdf>

When physical therapists engage in the provision of telerehabilitation services, they are **expected to comply with all CHCPBC regulatory requirements, standards and legislation** and to deliver physical therapy services that meet the same expectations for quality, competent care as services delivered in person.

This guide will assist physical therapists to understand these expectations and to develop policies and procedures to support quality, effective physical therapy care using technology. This document should be read in conjunction with the [CHCPBC Standards of Practice](#). Physical therapists who wish to deliver physical therapy services across jurisdictional borders within Canada must comply with the requirements of both the client's jurisdiction and the physical therapist's jurisdiction, and be aware of all regulatory requirements related to the delivery of cross-border physical therapy services, such as those established by the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators³. Physical therapists wishing to deliver physical therapy services in other countries are advised to contact the regulatory body in the jurisdiction in which the client resides.

³Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators (2019). Memorandum of Understanding: Cross Border Physiotherapy. Retrieved from <https://www.alliancept.org/licensure/cross-border-physiotherapy-within-canada/>

General Performance



Physical therapists must remember that the practice of physical therapy remains the same regardless of the modality used to deliver the service. Physical therapists must always act in the client's best interest by providing high-quality, client-centred care and with the objective of achieving the same outcomes when clients are treated remotely as would be expected when providing services face-to-face⁴.

When entering a therapeutic relationship, the first consideration should be whether it is appropriate to incorporate virtual care into service delivery. This decision must be made with a focus on the individual client's needs, rather than the availability of technology to deliver the services. The "appropriateness to be treated via telehealth should be determined on a case-by-case basis with selections based on physical therapist judgment, client preference, technology availability, risks and benefits, and professional standards of care⁵."

General Expectations

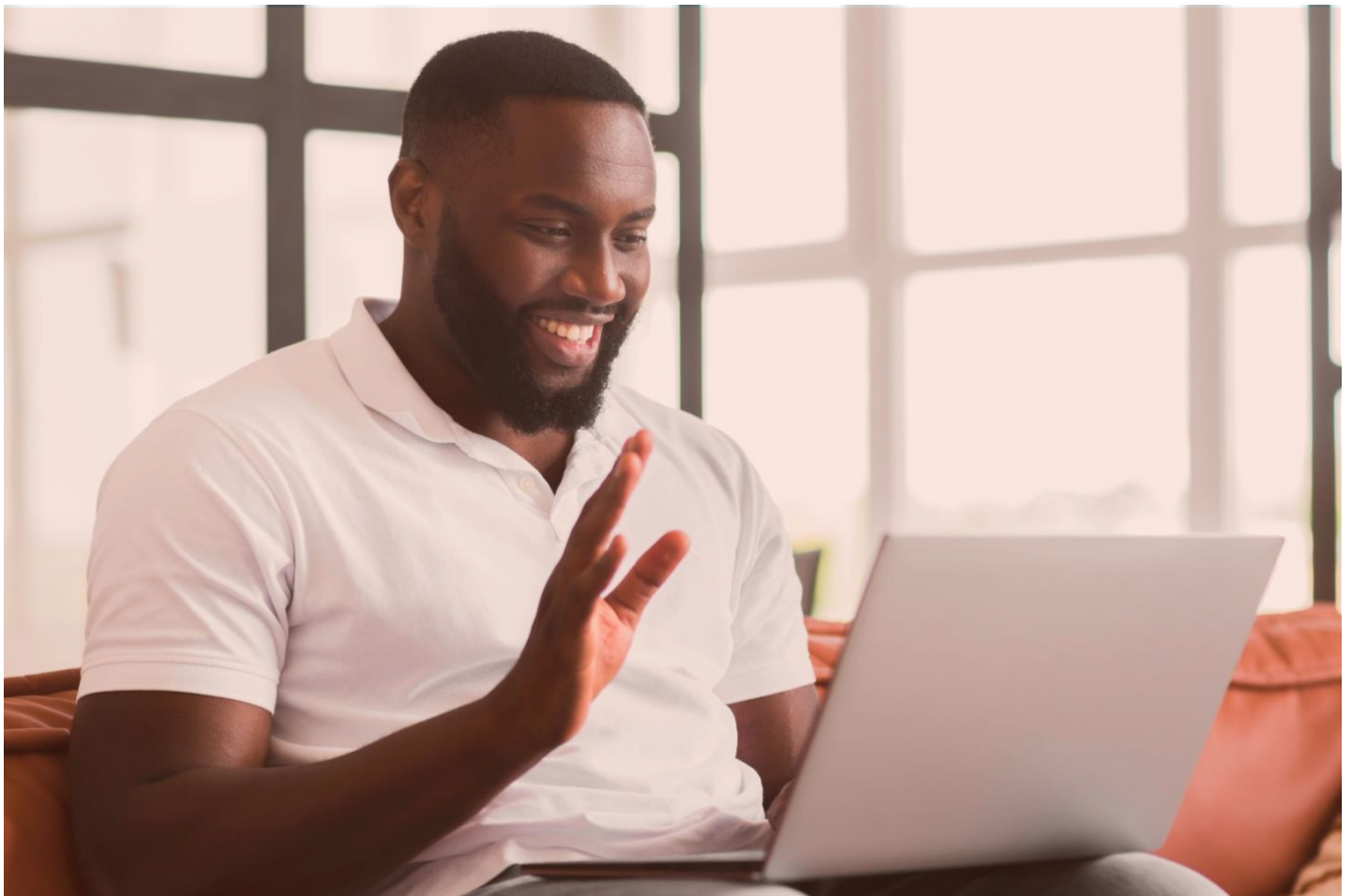
The physical therapist:

- Complies with applicable regulatory requirements, including registration and insurance requirements. When providing care virtually across borders within Canada, the physical therapist must comply with the requirements of both the client's jurisdiction and the physical therapist's jurisdiction.
- Complies with expectations defined in the CHCPBC [Standards of Practice](#) (in particular the [Standard of Practice: Virtual Care](#)) and [Code of Ethical Conduct](#). Assessment, intervention, consultations or treatment delivered using virtual technologies are held to the same standards and expectations as those delivered in person.
- Uses their professional judgment to determine if virtual care is appropriate, taking into consideration:
 - whether virtual care is the **most appropriate** available method to deliver services.
 - whether an in-person physical examination is required to complete the assessment and determine a physical therapy diagnosis and treatment plan.
 - the ability to deliver substantively similar care as physical therapy delivered face-to-face.
 - if client factors such as physical, sensory, or cognitive deficits may impact the ability to deliver appropriate care via telerehabilitation⁴.
- Ensures that virtual care does not expose the client to greater risk than other possible service delivery methods. This can include risks to the privacy of the client's health information or client safety depending on the physical environment and context in which services are provided.
- If a client has a concern or complaint about their physical therapy care, the physical therapist informs the client of the process to follow, including their ability to file a complaint in either or both jurisdictions if they choose (when services are provided across jurisdictional borders).

⁴ Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (2015). Telehealth: Research update and novel applications to meet the Triple Aim. Retrieved from https://www.fsbpt.org/Portals/0/documents/free-resources/Forum_Winter2015_Telehealth.pdf

⁵ Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (2015). Telehealth in Physical Therapy: Policy recommendations for appropriate regulation, p.2. Retrieved from <https://www.fsbpt.org/Portals/0/documents/free-resources/TelehealthInPhysicalTherapy2015.pdf>

Informed Consent



As with all physical therapy services, for consent to be valid it must first be informed. The general requirements for consent to treatment are outlined in the [Standard of Practice: Informed Consent](#) and in related documents such as [CHCPBC's Consent to Treatment](#) guide. When the physical therapist is providing virtual care services, the client must additionally consent to receiving care virtually, after clearly demonstrating an understanding of the limitations in virtual service delivery compared to in-person treatment and any differences between in-person care and virtual care⁶, such as, for example, additional risks to privacy and confidentiality.

Clients must be aware of available treatment options, including options to receive in-person care and the unique risks and benefits that virtual care provides.

Informed Consent Expectations

The physical therapist:

- Augments routine informed consent to treatment processes as required to support virtual care delivery. This may include consent:
 - to receive services virtually rather than in person.
 - for videotaping, recording or otherwise storing information and data from the virtual session.
 - for the transmission of information via virtual technologies.
 - for the participation of other healthcare providers or the client's family in the provision of care.
- Develops policies and procedures to:
 - verify their identity to clients.
 - verify the identity of the clients whom they serve (to the extent possible).
 - document the verification policy and processes used.
- Develops policies and procedures to verify the identity of any third parties who may be observers or engaged in the delivery of care (i.e. family members, other regulated or unregulated health professionals, physical therapist support workers, interim registrants) and obtains client consent for the presence of these individuals while delivering services.
- Informs clients of any limitations that virtual care services impose on physical therapy treatment, such as the inability to apply hands-on assessment and treatment if applicable.
- Informs clients of the risks inherent in virtual delivery of services, including risks to privacy of client information, the risks of information loss due to technology, and the safeguards employed to address these risks.

⁶ Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (2015). Telehealth: Research update and novel applications to meet the Triple Aim. Retrieved from https://www.fsbpt.org/Portals/0/documents/free-resources/Forum_Winter2015_Telehealth.pdf

Privacy



Physical therapists are expected to practice in compliance with all CHCPBC legislative and regulatory requirements; the practice of physical therapy using virtual technologies is no exception. Physical therapists need to be aware of and comply with the privacy legislation that is relevant to their practice.

For those in private practice, physical therapists must comply with the Personal Information Protection Act (see [Standard of Practice: Privacy and Record Retention](#) and [CHCPBC's Privacy Toolkit](#) for more details about privacy obligations).

For those in public practice, physical therapists must comply with the [Freedom of information and Protection of Privacy Act](#). Physical therapists also must be aware that when providing services to clients located in a different province or territory of Canada, the privacy legislation of both jurisdictions applies. In addition, the [Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act \(PIPEDA\)](#) applies when transmitting information across provincial or territorial borders.

Privacy Expectations

The physical therapist:

- Complies with all privacy and security requirements both during virtual care sessions and when in contact with the client through other electronic means, such as arranging appointments via email or text.
- Documents privacy and security measures used to protect the client's private information.
- Employs authentication technologies, encryption technologies and secure transmission systems and storage mechanisms in accordance with provincial and national privacy legislation.
- Develops policies and practices to ensure that client records cannot be accessed by unauthorized users, tampered with or destroyed, and are protected at both the originating and remote sites.
- Secures all physical devices (laptops, desktops, tablets, cell phones, servers) used in provision of virtual care and when storing client information related to virtual services.
- Complies with any employer policies for privacy and security related to virtual care.
- Maintains awareness of current and emerging risks to client privacy inherent in virtual practice and employs technical, administrative, and physical controls to address these risks.

Client Safety



[The Standard of Practice on Risk Management and Safety](#) identifies that clients can expect to be safe in the care of the physical therapist and in the practice environment. That over-arching expectation seems obvious, however, the question of how to achieve this in virtual practice is less so. The first step is to consider the various potential safety issues inherent in this practice, which may include:

- Failure of the communication technologies used to provide services.
- Client medical emergencies (e.g., falls, injuries, heart attack, stroke).
- Other emergencies (e.g., fire).

All physical therapists are responsible to consider the potential critical events that they may be faced within their practice and to develop plans to manage such events.

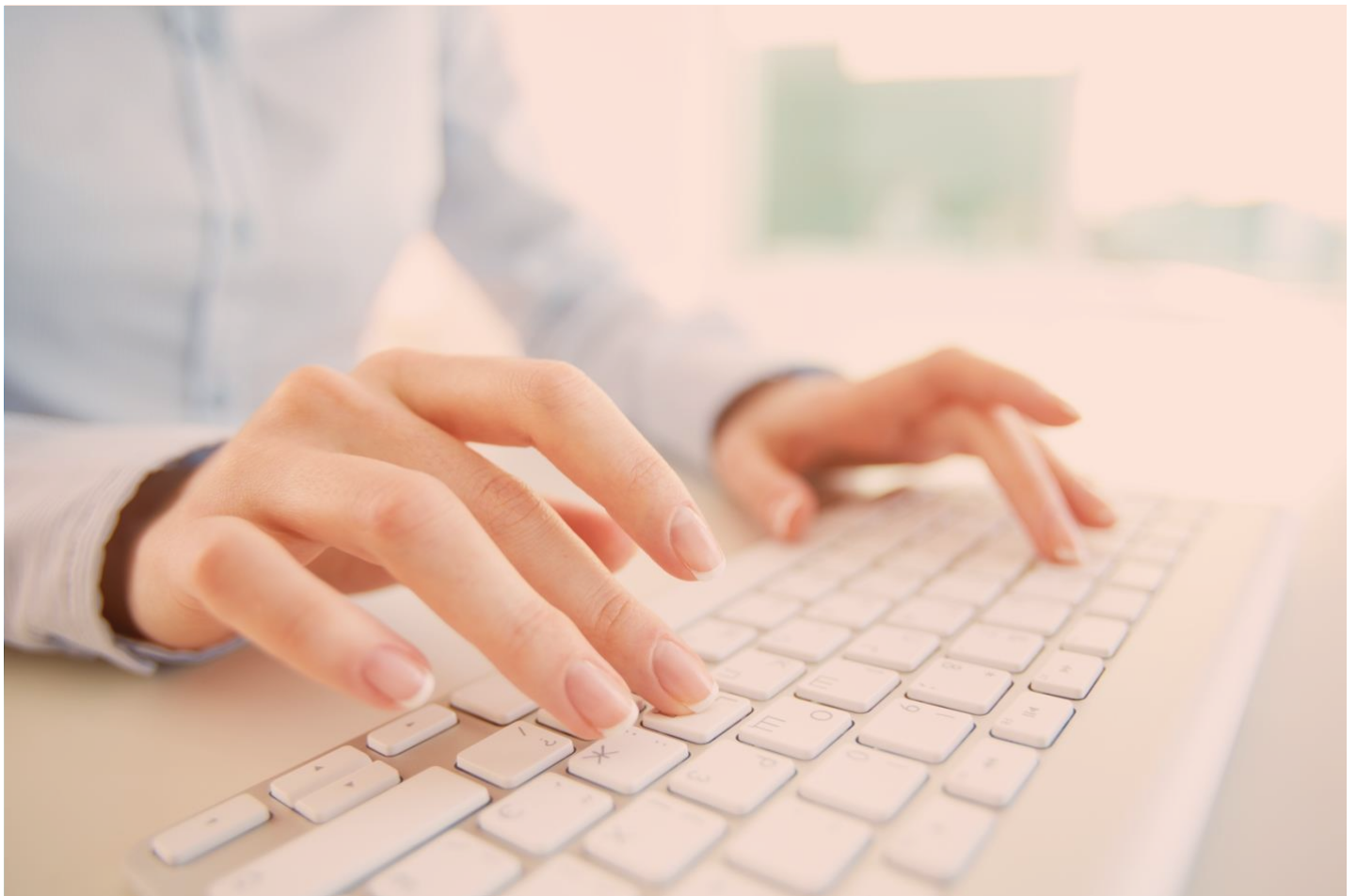
At no time should physical therapists compromise the quality and safety of physical therapy services by delivering virtual care services that are inappropriate or unsafe.

Safety Expectations

The physical therapist:

- Obtains access to appropriate technical support for trouble shooting in the event of technical difficulties.
- Tests all technologies prior to client appointments to ensure the system is functioning well.
- Has an alternative method of contacting the client and provides the client with an alternate way of contacting the physical therapist. For example, in the case of an internet failure the physical therapist must be able to telephone the client.
- Has a safety protocol in place in the event of an emergency or adverse event, including:
 - contact information for first responders in the client's location, using designated phone numbers local to the client. Calling 911 from the physical therapist's location will not connect to emergency services in the client's location.
 - contact information for others within the client's environment (care providers, family members), and client consent to contact these individuals in the event of an emergency or adverse event.
 - plans and procedures to follow to manage adverse events while waiting for assistance to arrive.
 - plans and procedures for managing adverse events that do not require assistance from a first responder.
- Should be aware of other service providers in the client's area that they may refer the client to in the event of a client adverse event or complication.
- Facilitates the transfer of care to another treatment provider if the physical therapist or client determines that virtual care is not appropriate.

Competence



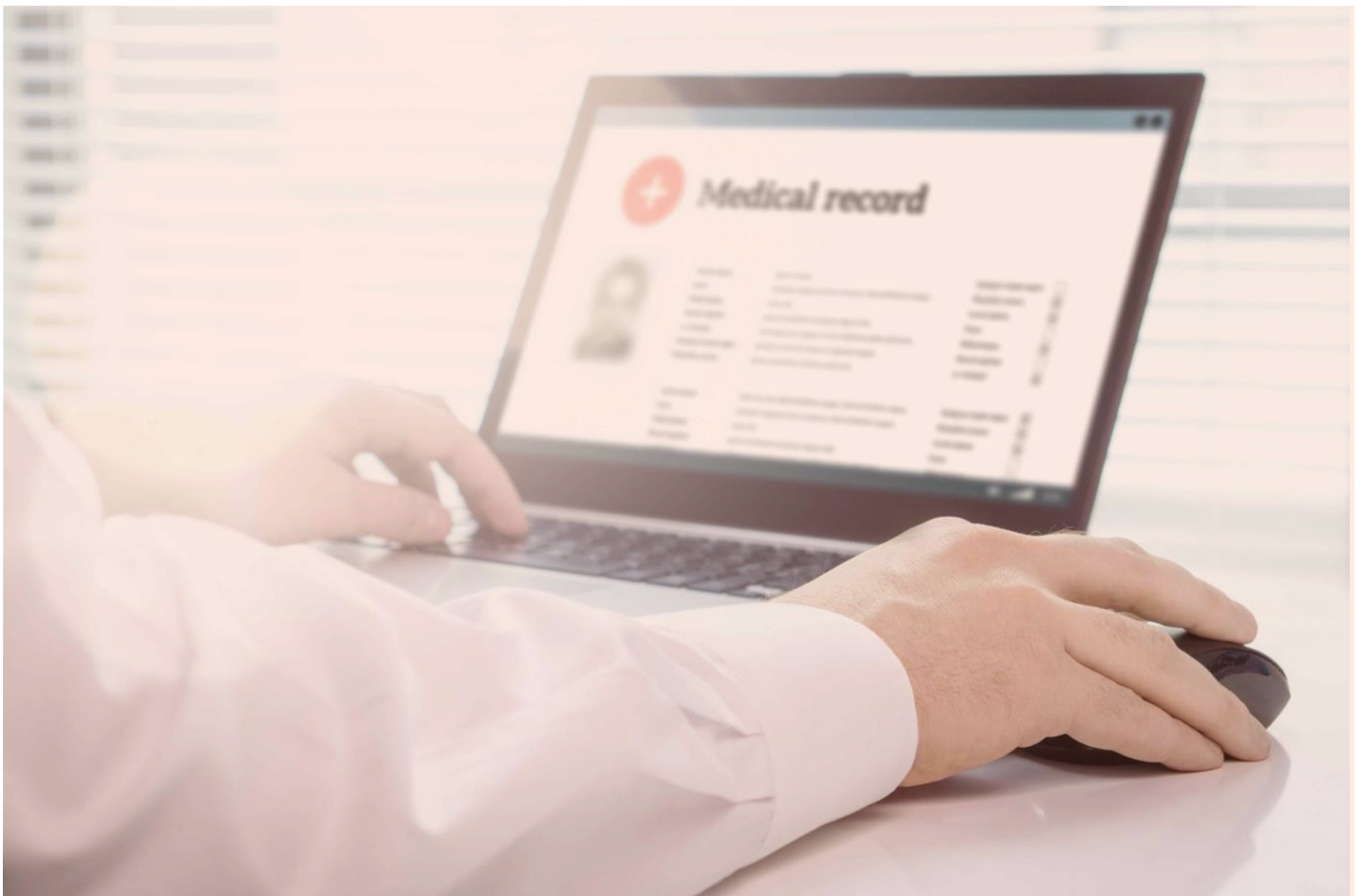
The use of virtual care in physical therapy is a relatively new way to deliver services for many physical therapists. As with any other new or unfamiliar practice, physical therapists must ensure they have the competence (knowledge, skills, and abilities) to safely and effectively engage in the practice. They should also actively seek further education to ensure they are using these technologies appropriately and effectively and to further develop their competence.

Competence Expectations

The physical therapist:

- Ensures their competence to use the technology.
 - Understands the system's capabilities and limitations, including privacy, security and storage options.
 - Has technology supports available if needed.
 - Evaluates and develops individual competencies to support the use of these technologies.
- Develops skills related to the delivery of services using virtual technologies.
 - Availability and use of assessment tools and outcome measures.
 - Development of rapport and therapeutic relationship.
 - Provision of interventions using a third party (family member or support worker) at the direction of the physical therapist.

Documentation



Services delivered virtually are subject to the same expectation of adherence to [Standard of Practice: Documentation](#) as in-person physical therapy services; however, several additional documentation and record-keeping requirements must be addressed.

Documentation Expectations

The physical therapist:

- Complies with the documentation standards of both jurisdictions when virtual care is delivered across borders.
 - If the clinical or financial record retention periods differ between jurisdictions, the physical therapist must retain the record for the longer period of time required.
- Retains accountability for evaluating any information gathered from a third-party source (such as a non-physical therapist health provider physically co-located with the client), to determine its reliability and accuracy, and the ability to incorporate the information into the assessment or treatment.
- Maintains written records of all interactions and interventions, consistent with the [Standard of Practice: Documentation](#).

If any part of the virtual session is recorded (video or audio), retains those recordings/images in the client record in accordance with provincial and national privacy legislation and regulatory practice standards.
- Ensures that the requirements related to clinical record retention are met such that there is enduring access to the clinical record for the record retention period.

Quality Improvement and Evaluation



Physical Therapists are expected to engage in continuous quality improvement by developing, implementing, and evaluating physical therapy services. The provision of virtual care is no exception. As part of ongoing competence and service development, physical therapists should track aspects of care such as, but not including, client outcomes (effectiveness of treatment interventions), client satisfaction, quality and efficiency of service delivery processes, etc.

Fees and Billing



The [Standard of Practice: Funding, Fees and Billing](#) requires physical therapists to provide fee schedules and invoices/receipts that are transparent, accurate, and comprehensive. Ensures that the client is aware of what services they can expect in return for fees charged.

- Provides receipts that clearly reflect that physical therapy services were delivered virtually.

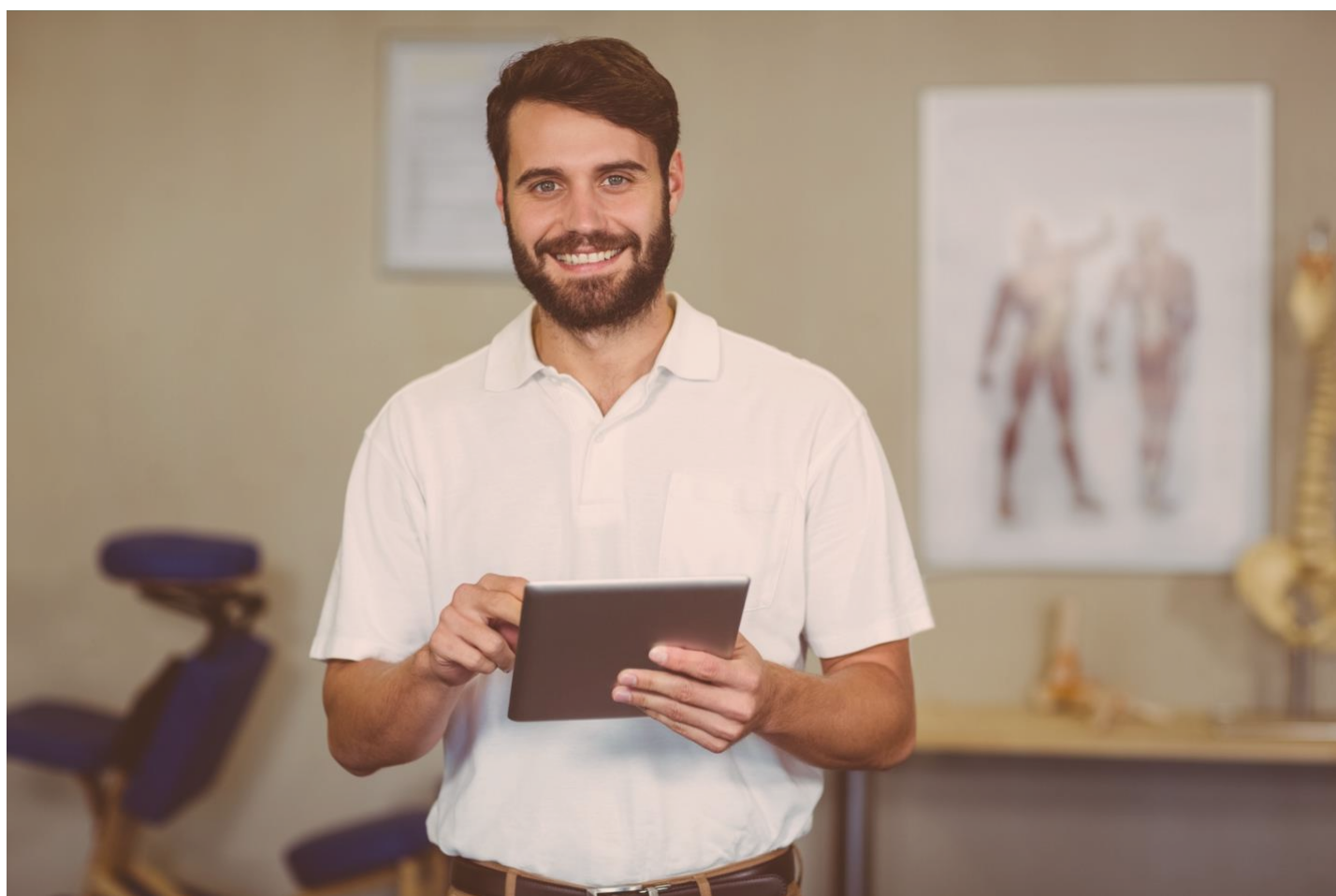
Supervision



Unregulated health providers such as physical therapist support workers may be actively involved in the delivery of virtual services. In some cases, they may be physically present and co-located with the client while the physical therapist is located remotely. In this situation, they may assist in conducting an assessment or delivering interventions at the direction of the physical therapist. In other cases, they may be using virtual technology to deliver physical therapy services remotely, under the indirect supervision of the physical therapist.

In either case, the physical therapist retains accountability for the assignment of services and for providing appropriate supervision to ensure the client receives quality, effective physical therapy care. For more information, review the [Standard of Practice: Supervision](#) and [CHCPBC's Supervision Guide](#).

External Resources



In addition to this CHCPBC Virtual Care Guide and the CPTBC webinar on telerehabilitation (April 9, 2020 - presented in collaboration with the Physiotherapy Association of British Columbia), there are many external resources available to provide guidance with respect to the practical aspects of delivering virtual care. Some suggested resources are below, but it is incumbent on the Physical Therapist to seek out current evidence and practice resources to ensure currency in practice as service delivery via virtual care evolves.

Physiotherapy Association of British Columbia:

- [PABC Virtual Care Toolkit](#)

American Physical Therapy Association:

- Telehealth [Advocacy](#)

Appendix A: Definitions



In-person services are those physical therapy services provided by a physical therapist in direct face-to-face contact with a person.

Client's jurisdiction is the province or territory in which the client is located.

Physical therapist's jurisdiction is the province or territory in which the physical therapist is located.

Telehealth is an umbrella term denoting all health care services, whether clinical or educational, which are delivered via telecommunications means.

Telerehabilitation or Virtual Care is the term agreed upon by each of the regulators of physical therapy in Canada and is used throughout this document to denote delivery of professional physical therapy services at a distance, using telecommunications technology as the service delivery medium⁷. It is a subgroup of telehealth.

Telerehabilitation / Virtual Care relates to the services delivered by a number of health disciplines including physical therapy. Physical therapy services encompass the aspects of client care described in [Standard of Practice: Assessment, Diagnosis, Treatment](#).

Telerehabilitation / Virtual Care can include mediums such as videoconferencing, email, apps, web-based communication, and wearable technology. Physical therapist support workers may or may not be present with the client⁸.

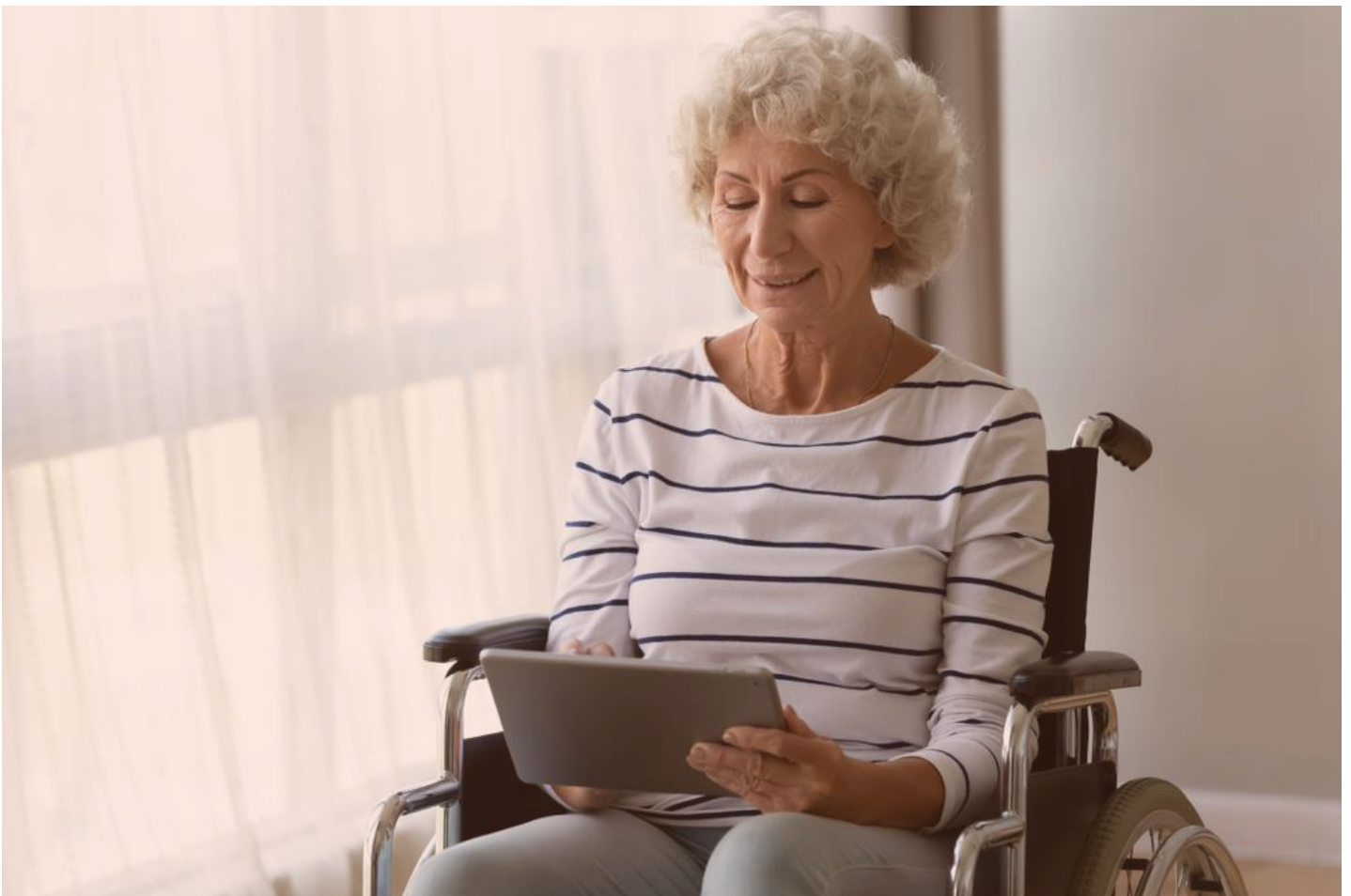
Conceptually, virtual care is an alternate mode of service delivery for traditional rehabilitation services and should not be thought of as a new rehabilitation service in its own right. As such, virtual practice does not remove or alter any existing responsibilities for the provider of the rehabilitation service and providers must adhere to existing ethical codes of conduct, scope of practice, provincial and national laws and individual discipline regulations guiding practice.

Telephysical therapy and telepractice are synonyms of telerehabilitation, used by some individuals and organizations.

⁷ Russell, T.G (2007). Physical rehabilitation using telemedicine. *Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare*, 13(5), p. 217-220. doi:10.1258/135763307781458886

⁸ Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators (2019). Memorandum of Understanding: Cross Border Physiotherapy. Retrieved from <https://www.alliancept.org/licensure/cross-border-physiotherapy-within-canada/> .

Appendix B: Client Education Materials



Virtual Care in physical therapy

Client Information

Virtual Care is the use of information or communication technologies to allow you and your physical therapist to connect via telephone, video or other remote monitoring technology to receive physical therapy services at a distance. Here are a few frequently asked questions about telerehabilitation in physical therapy.

When might virtual care be appropriate?

There are many circumstances where the use of virtual care may be an appropriate way to receive your physical therapy.

Virtual Care can help you access physical therapy services that are not possible for you to receive in person, either due to health reasons, or because they are not available in your community.

Virtual Care may be appropriate if you cannot easily attend an in-person visit. For example, if you have mobility or transportation issues, or have young children or parents at home to care for, your physical therapy needs could be met using telerehabilitation technologies. If you live a long distance from the hospital or even in another province or territory, it may not be in your interest to travel to receive care, but physical therapy may still be needed.

When would virtual care not be appropriate?

Virtual care may or may not entirely replace in-person care. It provides an option for assessment and treatment when an in-person visit is not possible or not preferred. It is up to you and the physical therapist to determine what is best for you, whether the necessary services can be provided virtually, and to ensure that the benefits outweigh the risks.

Will I get good quality care?

You should expect to receive the same safe, quality care that you would get during an in-person visit. Physical therapists are expected to meet the same Standards of Practice regardless of how the services are delivered.

What are the risks of receiving care via telerehabilitation?

The specific risks of receiving physical therapy virtually relate mostly to concerns about the privacy of your personal health information and your personal safety. The physical therapist is required to ensure that the location where you receive care is safe and that procedures are in place to ensure the availability of help in the event of an emergency. The physical therapist may recommend that the visit proceed in the presence of another team member or family member to enhance the safety and value of the visit.

Will my personal information still be private and secure?

Physical therapists are required to ensure the privacy and security of your personal information at all times. This extends to the technology they use as well as the appropriateness of the setting in which services are delivered. For example, rather than conducting the virtual visit when you or the physical therapist are in a public place, it is more appropriate for you to receive services in your home or at a medical facility, with the physical therapist communicating with you from their more private practice environment.

Do I have to pay for telerehabilitation physical therapy services?

Virtual physical therapy services are generally funded in the same way as in-person physical therapy services, paid either through government funding, a third-party extended health insurer, or by you. It is important to confirm that your third-party extended health insurer covers virtual care prior to consenting to receive services in this way.

If my physical therapist isn't in the room who will help me and what types of care can be provided?

Depending on the setting and the circumstances, physical therapists providing assessment or treatment virtually may not require assistance from another person or may have assistance from another physical therapist, physical therapist support worker, other healthcare providers, or from your family members or friends. The physical therapist is required to ensure that an appropriate level of support and assistance is available to address your needs and ensure your safety and that you agree to the involvement of this assistance.

Does my physical therapist need to be registered to deliver virtual treatment?

Physical therapists are required to be registered with the regulatory College in the province or territory where they deliver services. If they are delivering services across borders, they are required to be registered in both the province where they live and the province in which they are delivering services (where you live). Check with the regulatory body in each province to ensure that your physical therapist is registered before you begin treatment.

What if I have a concern or complaint about my care?

You may contact the physical therapy regulatory College in your province, the College in the physical therapist's own jurisdiction, or both, to file a complaint or express a concern. The two Colleges will share information if a complaint is received and will let you know the outcome of the complaint process.

Province / Territory	Website
British Columbia	http://chcpbc.org/
Alberta	https://www.physicaltherapyalberta.ca/
Saskatchewan	http://www.scpt.org/
Manitoba	http://www.manitobaphysio.com/
Ontario	http://www.collegept.org/Home
Quebec	https://oppq.qc.ca/en/
New Brunswick	http://www.cptnb.ca/
Nova Scotia	http://nsphysio.com/
Prince Edward Island	http://www.peicpt.com/
Newfoundland and Labrador	http://nlcpt.com/
Yukon	http://www.community.gov.yk.ca/physical_therapists/index.html
Northwest Territories	*
Nunavut	*

*When receiving care in the NWT/NU clients are advised to have the physical therapist show or otherwise provide you with their licensing information in another jurisdiction as there is no physical therapy regulatory body in these jurisdictions.