

August 28, 2024

Hon. Mark Holland
Minister of Health
Health Canada
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1A 0K9

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc
Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs
Privy Council Office
80 Wellington St.
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1A 0A3

Re: Employer Funded Virtual Care

Dear Minister Holland and Minister LeBlanc,

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) is the indispensable partner of business and Canada's largest, most influential provincial chamber. It is an independent, non-profit advocacy and member services organization representing a diverse network of 60,000 members. The OCC's mission is to convene, align and advance the interests of its members through principled policy work, value-added business services and broad engagement to drive competitiveness and economic growth in the province.

With feedback from the OCC's [Health Policy Council](#), I am writing to express our strong support for preserving and enhancing employer-funded virtual care services. Our Council, launched in April 2020, provides timely recommendations to governments on health care system modernization, innovation, and resilience. We emphasize the importance of government healthcare investment for both health and economic benefits, including workforce productivity, job creation, efficient service delivery, improved population health, and innovation.

In December 2020, the OCC published [Realizing the Full Potential of Virtual Care in Ontario](#), which recognizes the essential role that virtual care plays in Ontario's health system—particularly for those in rural, remote, northern, and Indigenous communities. This report calls for employers' continued investment in virtual care for their employees to expand their options and help Ontarians get back to work.

In recognition of the role that virtual care options play in our health ecosystem, we are calling upon the federal government to preserve and enhance these essential services.

The Importance of Employer-Funded Virtual Care

Employer-funded virtual care services have become an essential component of our health care system. These services provide widespread access to care and treatment across the province at no cost to patients, ensuring positive health and economic outcomes for Ontario. They also represent a cost-effective measure for long-term preventive healthcare, which is crucial for the sustainability of our healthcare system.

Virtual care services funded by employers offer numerous benefits, including increased:

- **Capacity:** Many healthcare providers working in employer-funded virtual care are doing so in addition to their existing roles in the public health care system, adding additional hours and capacity that would otherwise not be available and enabling the health system to service more Ontarians.
- **Resources:** At a time when healthcare dollars are stretched, and waitlists are growing employer-funded services add vital resources to a strained system.
- **Accessibility:** Employees can access medical consultations and health services from the comfort of their homes, reducing the need for time off work and travel.
- **Mental Health Supports:** Virtual care provides a convenient way for employees to access mental health services, which is particularly important given the rising mental health challenges in the workforce.
- **Cost Savings:** Virtual care can lower overall healthcare costs for employers and the health care system by reducing the need for in-person visits.

Removing employer-funded virtual care services would have significant negative impacts, including eliminating access for a quarter of Canadians without a viable alternative. Beyond the direct impact on these families, the increased strain on emergency rooms, walk-in clinics, and publicly funded virtual care programs would be significant at a time when many of these services are already stretched beyond capacity.

Further, the economic impact of these changes would increase employee absenteeism, decrease productivity, and delay access to care, exacerbating negative health outcomes.

Preserving Employer-Funded Virtual Care

While we support the principle of universal access and ensuring equitable access for all Canadians, we call on the Government of Canada to take a pragmatic approach to addressing the need to integrate employer-funded virtual care into our health systems while taking the necessary steps to preserve and enhance these services. This includes ensuring that any interpretation of the *Canada Health Act* supports the continued provision of virtual care by employers.

The private sector plays a critical role in supporting our public healthcare system by investing in the health and well-being of Ontarians both as employers and by providing a variety of services. By working together, we can ensure Canadians continue to benefit from the innovative and accessible care that virtual health services provide.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Daniel Tisch, APR, FCPRS, ICD.D
President and CEO
Ontario Chamber of Commerce

CC:

Hon. Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, Government of Ontario
Cyndi Jenkins, Chief of Staff, Minister of Health, Government of Canada