

Prince Edward Islanders' Experiences with Virtual Health Care

The Virtual Care Project Coordination Centre

The Virtual Care Project Coordination Centre (VCPCC) at Health PEI supports the adoption of virtual care in the province by carrying out a two-year Virtual Care Action Plan to expand virtual care services across PEI. A key part of the Centre's work is listening to patients and learning how to best support them with virtual health care services.

In 2022, to better understand Islanders' use of virtual care services and what was working or not working, the VCPCC carried out a province-wide virtual care patient survey and a series of community meetings. Virtual care was defined *as a way to visit with your health care team when not in-person. Virtual care uses your phone, tablet, or computer.*

Who Was Engaged

In June 2022, the VCPCC invited all Islanders 18+ years of age (users and non-users of virtual care) to participate in a voluntary and anonymous virtual care patient survey. The survey was available in both English and French. A paper copy of the survey was available upon request by telephone.

In June and August 2022, the VCPCC carried out a series of virtual community meetings open to all Islanders to discuss virtual care. Three meetings were held in English and one meeting was in French.

What We Heard

Islanders generously shared their experiences and thoughts on virtual care. Below are some of the key findings from the survey and community meetings.

Patient Survey

More than 1000 Islanders participated in the survey. The majority of respondents were from Queen's County and were over 35 years of age. Over half of the respondents had used virtual care services, and most respondents who had not used virtual care had heard of it. Most respondents reported that they were comfortable or very comfortable with technology and would use virtual care again.

Top advantages of virtual care were faster/easier access to care, saved time, and avoidance of communicable diseases. Half of the users who responded had not encountered any problems when using virtual care, however others reported issues such as their request for a virtual visit being declined, issues with access, the need for improved communication, appropriateness of the virtual visit, etc.

Non-users of virtual care also shared several factors that stopped them from using virtual care, including concerns about using the service without chargeⁱ, the person providing health care not offering a virtual visit, and a range of other issues such as lack of information or comfort, issues with technology or access, and limited value of virtual care. For some respondents, virtual services did not meet their health needs.

Based on recent experiences with virtual care, areas for improvement included clearer directions/support on what to do before or during a virtual visit, better technical experience, and clearer directions/support on what to do after an appointment.

Respondents also cited themes related to the need for changes to virtual care services (e.g., better hours, scope of issues treated, availability), improved communication on services and follow-up, and challenges experienced with 'websites' etiquette, etc.

Community Meetings

Twenty-four Islanders participated in four community meetings and their stories echoed what we heard in the survey about challenges and opportunities with virtual care. Themes generally centered around the availability and accessibility of quality care, appropriateness and effectiveness of virtual care, and the need for access to information.

Participants shared mixed reports of their experience using virtual care. For some it was a positive experience, offering convenience, access, and comfort knowing care was ‘just a phone call away.’ Others experienced challenges such as not being able to get the care they wanted (e.g., a referral), issues with access or quality of care and virtual care not being appropriate for their health concern.

Participants cited numerous examples of changes needed such as improved communication about virtual care services, better access to information (such as guidelines of when/where to seek care), more options to access health care, and a direct contact number for support.

What We are Doing Now

Health PEI is committed to improving virtual care services and support in the province. Below are a few of the actions taken, or are underway, to enhance patients’ experience of virtual care:

- **A Virtual Care Technical Support Person** is now available for all Islanders – patients and providers – to help navigate virtual care and provide a human point of contact for technical solutions ([Virtual Care Technical Support Desk | Government of Prince Edward Island](#))
- **Patient-focused, plain language resources** about virtual care including options and preparing for a virtual visit, and frequently asked questions (<https://healthpei.ca/virtualcare>)
- **Primary Care at Health PEI** is working to expand services to the unaffiliated patient population
- **Information sharing** with leaders, including Executive Leadership, across Health PEI about what Islanders have asked for and opportunities for improvement, such as improved communication about virtual care services and continued focus on equity and accessibility

Where can I get more information about virtual care services in PEI?

For more information about virtual care options, technical support, resources, and preparing for a virtual appointment, please visit <https://healthpei.ca/virtualcare>

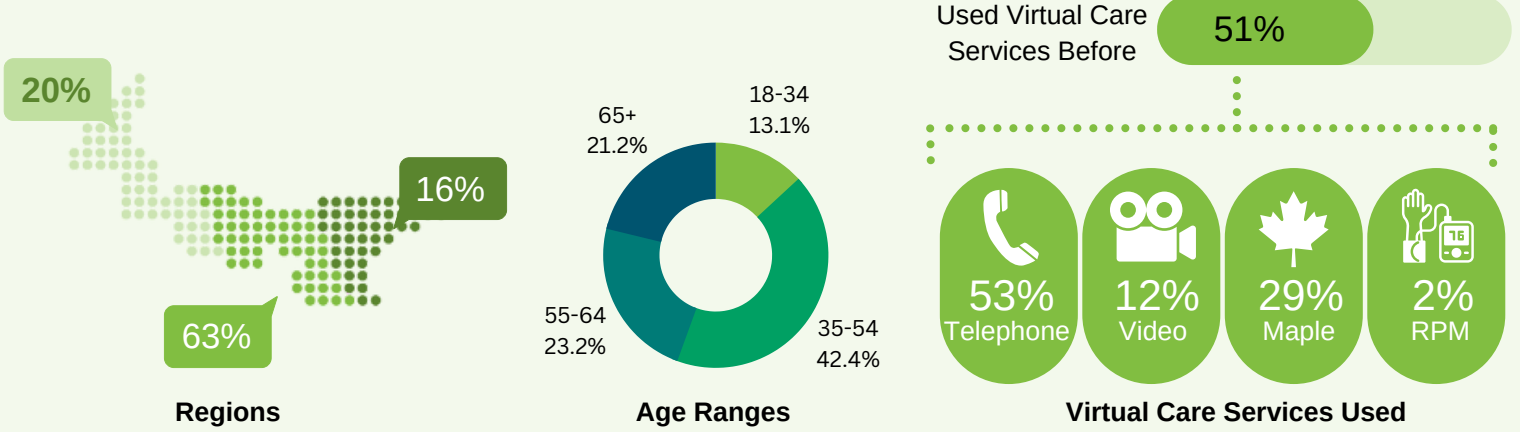
Questions?

If you have questions about this summary or suggestions for improving virtual care in PEI, please email VirtualCare@ihis.org

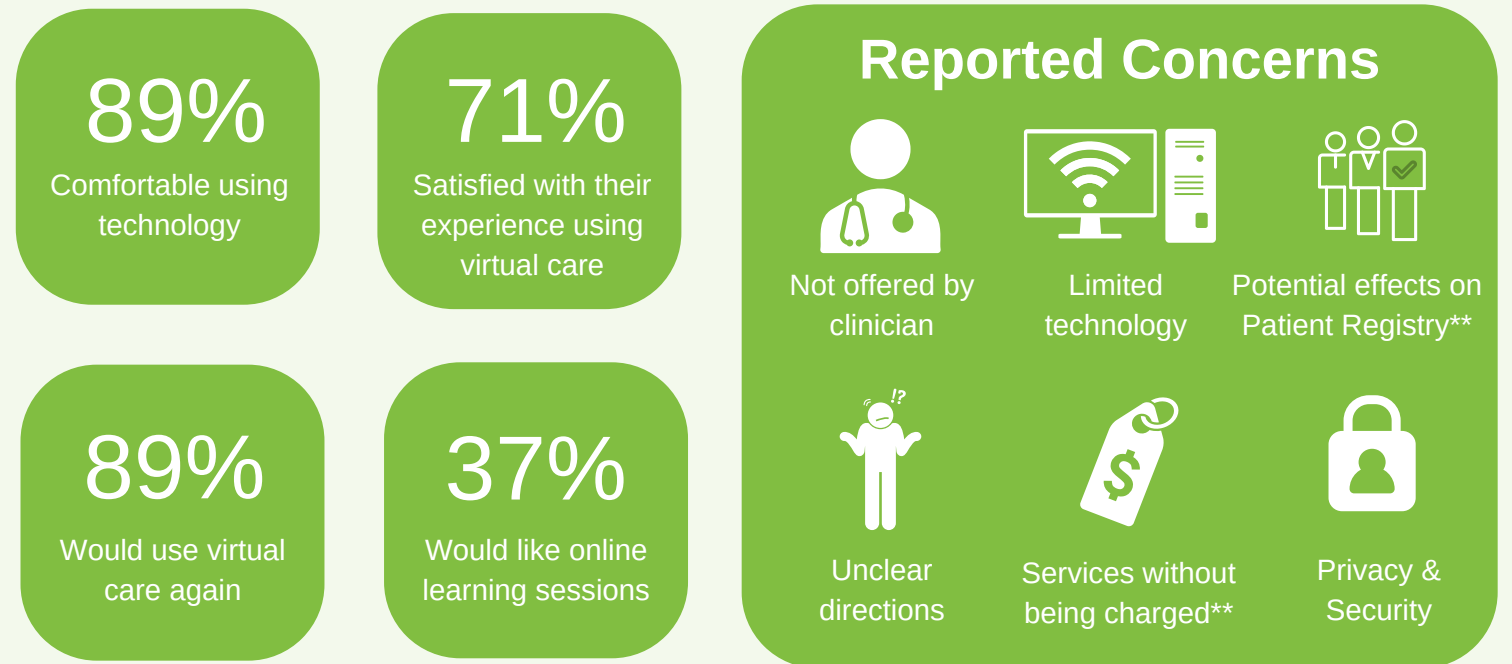
ⁱ Using the Unaffiliated Virtual Care Program does not affect your position on the Patient Registry and is available free of charge

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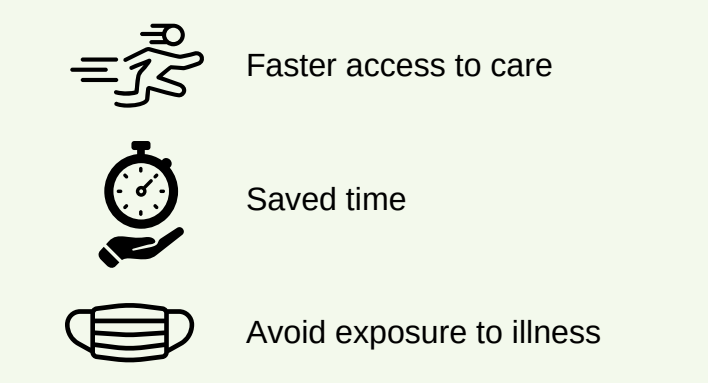
Who took our survey



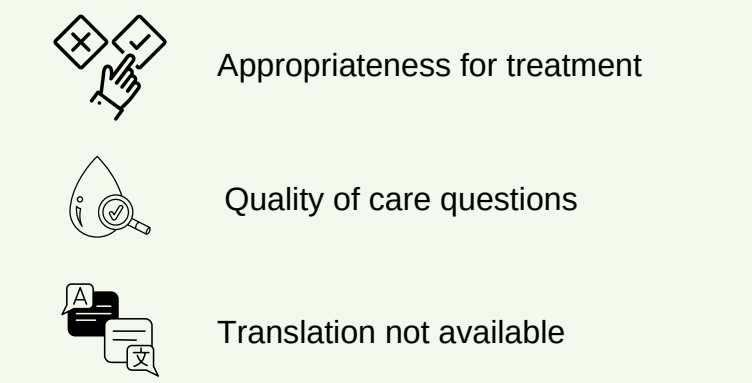
What Islanders said



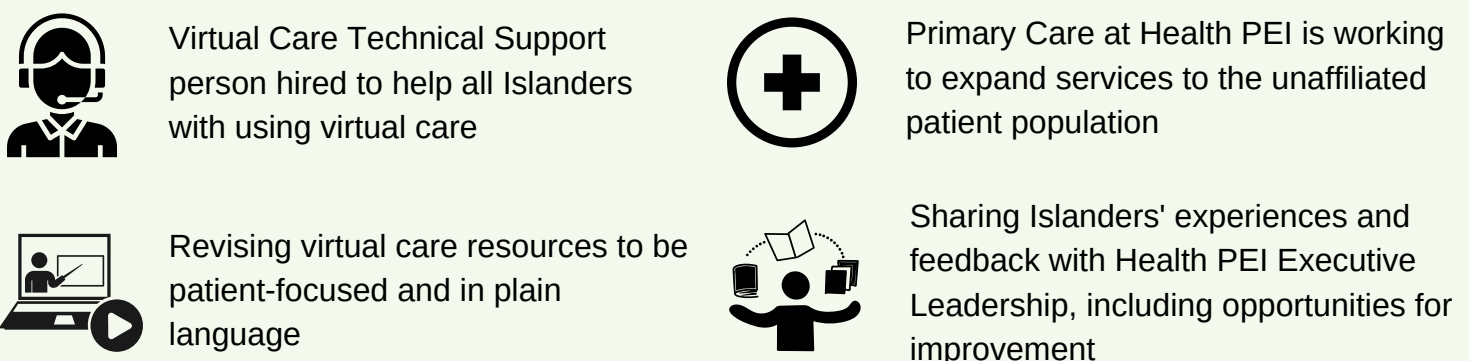
What Islanders liked



What Islanders disliked



What We're Doing Now



*Based on 1080 completed responses

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