

Videoconferencing Guidelines for Developmental Services Agencies

June 2016

Purpose

The *Videoconferencing Guidelines for Developmental Services Agencies* are intended to clarify the expectations for the use of the videoconferencing service/systems that are funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS).

These guidelines:

- Outline expectations regarding the use of MCSS-funded videoconferencing services;
- Discuss best practices around videoconferencing.

Background

MCSS has funded province-wide developmental services agency videoconferencing services through the Community Networks of Specialized Care since 2007.

The Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) is a Ministry of Health and Long Term Care-supported not-for-profit organization chosen for the videoconferencing delivery as they were easily able to provide the infrastructure to connect all of the agency and network sites, and to link them into health services (such as hospitals and other clinicians). When OTN began and when MCSS first purchased their services, fees included not only telemedicine and videoconferencing, but also network connectivity.

The videoconferencing program is coordinated by the Community Network of Specialized Care (CNSC) Central East Region, Community Living Huronia. When first implemented in 2007 the intended investment from MCSS was to provide videoconferencing service to allow individuals with a developmental disability, and their families, the ability to access clinical services from a wide range of specialists and access to educational resources, regardless of where they live in Ontario. This could include MCSS-funded specialized services, or health services (as OTN is the telemedicine network used in the health sector).

The primary advantage of using OTN has been the secure environment to support clinical work and ease of connections to other clinical providers. An environment such as OTN is not necessarily required for educational or administrative events, but could be used for those if need be.



Context and Scope

MCSS will be entering its tenth year with OTN, and it is timely to evaluate the various ways OTN services have been used. OTN has also recently made changes to their service agreements and will no longer provide circuit connectivity as part of the annual membership fee. This change of services will require DS agencies to absorb or incur additional circuit connection fees that were previously included as part of OTN's annual membership fee structure.

It is recognized since the original implementation of the OTN services, there has been an increase of alternative videoconferencing options which are also secure environments for videoconferencing. Thus, funding OTN services may no longer be a cost-effective way to provide videoconferencing services. As a result, MCSS will no longer mandate that DS agencies operate videoconferencing using OTN services.

Current State

As of 2015/16 there are 131 videoconferencing sites across Ontario, and the annual cost of maintaining a site ranges from \$5,923 to \$19,113 in any given year (the annual cost is higher for sites with multiple room-based system and/or personal computer videoconferencing (PCVC) users). The \$19,113 cost includes OTN membership fees, equipment refresh costs, and general maintenance. Still relevant, though outside of the videoconferencing budget are the videoconference coordinators that are funded by the CNSCs to support the provision of provincial videoconferencing services.

The videoconference coordinators assist with the following activities:

- Scheduling videoconference events and finding suitable locations;
- Problem solving with hardware and software;
- Liaison with agencies and their videoconferencing personnel, to solicit information on the use of the videoconference technologies;
- Liaison with other Networks to examine current and future educational needs;
- Select and utilize various information-gathering tools in order to ascertain perceived needs and opportunities for videoconferencing; and,
- Data collection and analysis.

In the fall of 2015, OTN advised MCSS along with CNSCs that the annual membership fees would no longer include circuit connectivity, since the OTN is transitioning away from being a primary circuit provider. As of January 2016, CNSCs have been supporting the DS agencies with moving to other circuit provider options to support videoconferencing.



Best Practices

Videoconferencing Use

Videoconferencing has been used by developmental services agencies for three main purposes: clinical, planning and educational events. **If agencies are only engaging in planning and educational events, other services or technology should be explored.**

Clinical services are defined by any assessment or treatment that involves direct observation or interaction with an individual. Services that fall under this category are:

- Psychological assessments;
- Specialized assessments and/or consultations
- Eligibility confirmation;
- Behavioural therapy/consultations;
- Case conferences; and,
- Referrals

Videoconferencing Partnerships


If an agency currently is an MCSS-funded OTN videoconferencing site, but recognizes that it is not used frequently enough to justify the rising annual costs (and particularly not for clinical uses), fostering a partnership with a nearby agency with their own OTN site is strongly recommended. Agencies are able to voluntarily opt-out of OTN services. CNSC Videoconference coordinators can be contacted to assist with connecting agencies with each other to develop videoconferencing partnerships. CNSC coordinators can also support agencies to move from wall-mounted to more portable VC units and/or transition to other compatible VC services. **It is expected that all MCSS-funded OTN sites are made available to partnering agencies where possible, with no associated user or system access/administrative fees.**

Exceptions

The ministry recognizes that some areas may still have limited access to network and videoconferencing services. With that in mind, if the OTN is the only reliable videoconferencing option available, it will be continued to be supported. CNSC videoconferencing coordinators can support agencies to learn how to increase their use of the systems.

Videoconference Usage Targets

Moving forward, MCSS will be more closely monitoring to identify which sites are utilizing the videoconference services. **The annual target that is required to be met in order to maintain access to MCSS-funded videoconferencing services is 75 events a year.** Additional factors will



also be considered such as hours of usage, trends, cost benefit and proximity to other MCSS funded VC systems.

CNSC videoconferencing coordinators will continue to monitor all VC events and distribute quarterly reports identifying under-utilized sites as well manage unforeseen circumstances inhibiting quarterly target achievements.

If an agency cannot meet their videoconference usage targets the agency will be at risk of having their videoconferencing site decommissioned. CNSC videoconferencing coordinators **must** be contacted to assist with transitioning to an alternative videoconferencing provider. Agencies are encouraged to contact their regional office Program Supervisor with any questions or concerns.