



## Telehealth Resource Guide for Pedorthics

### Introduction

The College of Pedorthics of Canada (CPC) primary mission is to protect the Canadian public and set the standard of care for the pedorthic profession in Canada. As the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, the health and safety of pedorthic patients, partners and employees is a top priority for the CPC. We are working to support best practice in clinical care and are following the advice and requirements of provincial health officials.

The CPC has been approached and asked about the use of tele-health/virtual care (Telehealth, for the purposes of this document, includes telephone and video technology) for providing pedorthic services. Based on the research and resources there is guidance to support the adoption and integration of telehealth visits in pedorthics. As patient safety and care are of utmost importance, treatment providers must continue to meet the standard of care (<https://cpedcs.ca/about-the-college/standards-of-practice/>) as laid out by the CPC.

The telehealth delivery of pedorthic services using electronic communication technologies is a viable option to perform certain aspects within the scope of practice. The use of these technologies enables increased access to pedorthic services for individuals needing access to care during the pandemic.

When providers engage in the provision of telehealth services, they are expected to be aware of and comply with all standards of care that applies to their practice and to deliver pedorthic services that meet the same expectations for quality, competent care as services delivered in person.

Broadly speaking, telehealth refers to services that use any form of technology (including but not restricted to video conferencing, internet and telephone) as an alternative to face-to-face interventions.

This resource is intended to assist pedorthists to understand these expectations and develop policies and procedures to support quality, effective pedorthic care using technology. This document should be read in conjunction with the **Standards of Practice** relevant to the pedorthist's practice.

## **General Performance Requirements**

The Pedorthist:

Complies with the code of ethics and standards of practice that are a practical guide for a pedorthist everyday professional practice. The standards are, first and foremost, a tool designed to help professionals assess their practice relative to the expectations of peers, colleagues and the profession as a whole. The standards are performance baselines against which professionals may be measured if their practice is called into question.

Uses their professional judgement to determine whether telehealth is appropriate and whether it will enable them to meet the standard of care. Things to consider:

- Whether telehealth is the most appropriate available method to deliver certain services.
- Whether a direct physical appointment is required to complete the assessment to determine the treatment plan.
- The ability to deliver similar care as a pedorthist delivers face-to-face.
- If patient factors such as physical, sensory, or cognitive deficits may impact the ability to deliver appropriate care virtually.

Complies with the expectation defined in the standard of care. The same standards will be used to judge patient care whether it is in-person or via telehealth.

Ensures that telehealth does not expose the patient to greater risk than other possible service delivery methods. This includes privacy and patient health safety.

Ensures consent is received for telehealth treatment and what aspects of the treatment can be done virtually and what will require an in-person consultation.

## **Informed Consent**

As with all pedorthic services, for consent to be valid it must first be informed. In addition to the general requirements for consent outlined in the Standards of Practice and related documents, with regards to telehealth, the patient must have a clear understanding of the care they can receive virtually. Patients must be aware of available treatment options, including options to receive in-person care and the unique risks and benefits that telehealth provides.

### **Informed Consent Expectations**

The pedorthist:

Augments routine informed consent processes as required to support telehealth care delivery. This may include express consent:

- To receive certain pedorthic services via telehealth rather than in person.
- For videotaping, recording or otherwise storing information and data from the telehealth session.
- For the transmission of information via telehealth technologies.

Develops policies and procedures to:

- Verify their identity to patients.
- Verify the identity of the patients 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) and obtains patient and provider consent for the presence of these individuals while delivering services.

Informs patients of any limitations that telehealth services impose on pedorthic treatment, such as the inability to apply hands-on evaluation and treatment if applicable.

Informs patients of the risks inherent in delivery of services using telehealth, including risks to privacy of patient information and safeguards employed to address these risks.

## Privacy

Pedorthists are expected to practice in compliance within their standards of care relevant to their practice; the practice of pedorthics using telehealth technologies is no exception. Pedorthists need to be aware of and comply with the privacy legislation that is relevant to their practice.

### Privacy Expectations

The pedorthist:

- Complies with all privacy and security requirements both during telehealth sessions and when in contact with the patient through other electronic means, such as arranging appointments via email.
- Documents privacy and security measures used to protect the patient's private information.
- Employs authentication and encryption technologies as well as secure transmission systems and storage mechanisms.
- Develops policies and practices to ensure that patient 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 used in telehealth and when storing information related to telehealth services.
- Is aware of any employer policies for privacy and security related to telehealth.
- Maintains awareness of current and emerging risks to patient privacy inherent to telehealth practice and employs technical, administrative, and physical controls to address these risks.

**Appropriate Technical Solution:** To protect customers' information, telehealth must only be delivered via appropriate applications and solutions. Where services are delivered by a means other than telephone, providers must ensure that:

Telehealth is delivered using a confirmed, secure, authenticated and encrypted application.

*Note: Skype, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, Facebook Messenger and other consumer-grade applications are not considered secure or appropriate for medical care.*

Information recorded or noted during the session is stored in compliance with applicable privacy legislation and regulations, and that any appropriate consent has been obtained.

## **Safety Considerations**

Patients have an expectation of safety and the standard of practice for pedorthics addresses this need. That over-arching expectation seems obvious, however, the question of how to achieve this in a telehealth practice is less so. The first step is to consider the various safety issues that are possible within this type of practice, which may include:

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

All pedorthists are responsible to consider the potential critical events that they may be faced with in their practice and to develop plans to manage such events.

At no time should pedorthists compromise the quality and safety of pedorthic services by delivering telehealth services that are inappropriate or unsafe.

## **Safety Expectations**

The pedorthist:

- Obtains access to appropriate technical support for trouble shooting in the event of technical difficulties.
- Tests all technologies prior to patient appointments to ensure the system is functioning well.
- Has an alternative method of contacting the patient and provides the patient with an alternate way of contacting the pedorthist. For example, in the case of an internet failure you must be able to telephone the patient.
- Has a safety protocol in place in the event of an emergency or adverse event, including:
  - Contact information for local first responders, using designated phone numbers rather than 911.
  - Contact information for others within the patient's environment (care providers, family members), and patient 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 also be aware of other service providers in the patient's area that they may refer the patient to in the event of a patient adverse event or complication.
- Facilitates the transfer of care to another treatment provider if the pedorthist or patient determines that telehealth is not appropriate.

## **Competence**

The use of telehealth in podorthotics is a new way to look at servicing your patients. As with any other new approach, podorthotists must consider if they have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to safely and effectively engage in the practice. They should also actively seek out further education to ensure they are using these technologies appropriately and effectively and to further develop their knowledge and skills.

### **Competence Expectations**

The podorthotist:

Ensures their competence to use the technology.

- Understands the system's capabilities and limitations.
- Has technology supports available if needed.
- Evaluates and develops individual eHealth competencies to support the use of these technologies.

Develops skills related to the delivery of services using telehealth technologies.

- Assessment and outcome measurement(s).
- Development of rapport and therapeutic relationship.
- Provision of interventions using a third party or delivered by the patient at the direction of the podorthotist.

## **Documentation**

Services delivered via telehealth are subject to the same Standards of Practice as in-person podiatric services; however, several additional documentation and recordkeeping considerations must be addressed.

### **Documentation Expectations**

The podiatrist:

Retains accountability for evaluating any information gathered from a third-party source (such as a non-podiatrist health provider physically co-located with the patient), to determine its reliability and accuracy and the ability to incorporate the information into the assessment or treatment.

Maintains written records summarizing all interventions consistent with the Standards of Practice.

Retains any video or audio recordings generated as part of telehealth interventions as part of the patient record.

### **Additional Requirements**

## **Quality Improvement and Evaluation**

The Standards of Practice require that podiatrists engage in continuous quality improvement by developing, implementing, and evaluating new or revised podiatric services. The provision of care using telehealth technologies is no exception. As part of ongoing competence and service development, podiatrists should continually track:

- Patient outcomes (effectiveness of treatment interventions).
- Patient satisfaction.
- Cost-effectiveness of services, including:
  - Business costs compared with other service models.
  - Patient/payer costs.

## **Fees and Billing**

Podiatrists are required to provide fee schedules and invoices/receipts that are transparent, accurate, and comprehensive. When delivering services using telehealth, the podiatrist:

- Ensures that the patient is aware of what services they can expect in return for fees charged.
- Provides receipts that clearly reflect that podiatric services were delivered via telehealth.

## **Supervision**

Unregulated health providers may be actively involved in the delivery of telehealth services. In some cases, they may be physically present and co-located with the patient while the podiatrist is located remote to the patient and deliver interventions at the direction of the podiatrist. In other cases, the

unregulated health provider may be applying telehealth technology to deliver pedorthic services remotely, under indirect supervision of the pedorthist.

In either case, the pedorthist retains accountability for the assignment of services and for providing appropriate supervision to ensure the patient receives quality, effective pedorthic care. For more information, review the Standard of Practice and additional guidelines and documents related to supervision.

*The CPC acknowledges the College of Physiotherapists of Manitoba and Physiotherapy Alberta – College + Association for reference of the information provided.\_*