Provincial Health
Services Authority

Virtual health competency framework
For health-care providers delivering virtual health

**A joint collaboration with clinical partners and
patient and family partners**

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Acknowledgement

The Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) main office is located on the unceded, ancestral, and occupied, traditional lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Səlílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh), and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nations. We wish to acknowledge with gratitude that this framework will be received on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of many B.C. First Nations who have cared and nurtured this land for all time and give thanks for allowing us as visitors to live, work and care together. We also acknowledge that there are other Indigenous people that live on these lands that originate from their own respective territories outside of these lands, the Chartered Communities of the Métis Nation B.C., and Inuit.

The Provincial Virtual Health (PVH) recognizes there are significant gaps in virtual health solutions for Indigenous communities in B.C. We also recognize that many Indigenous communities have been leaders in virtual health and have knowledge and wisdom to contribute to the delivery of virtual health in PHSA.

Purpose & scope

The PVH Virtual Health Competency Framework can help support all PHSA health care providers (HCPs) prepare and deliver safe, appropriate and effective virtual health to their clients and families. Given PHSA's diverse, province-wide clinical services, the purpose of the virtual health competency framework is to serve as a **foundational resource** to complement, support and inform individual, program and/or population level competencies.

The evidence- and expertise-informed competency framework is organized into 4 domains that reflect both foundational and functional competencies needed to deliver safe, high-quality virtual health.

The competency domains span the knowledge, skills, behaviours and judgement needed to provide virtual health related to: ensuring the HCP is aware of the legal, professional and organizational policies guiding their work; understanding how to safely and effectively utilize technological tools; incorporating an equity-oriented approach to virtual health; and adapting assessment and communication competencies for the virtual health setting.

Recommended use

PVH recognizes that HCPs at PHSA may have varying levels of pre-existing virtual health competencies and exposure to virtual health technology. We also appreciate that similar to other practice competencies, HCPs virtual health competency proficiency will change over time. However, the foundational competencies included in this framework should consistently apply to HCP's clinical practice and can be used:

- By both novice and experienced virtual health users as a baseline assessment and self-reflective practice tool.

- By experienced virtual health users to inform on leading practices currently available in the literature.

This competency framework is best accessed from the virtual health practice and education webpage which will include up-to-date links. If resource links fail to open, kindly email PVHeducation@phsa.ca with details.

Key definitions

Competency

An observable ability of a HCP to apply the appropriate knowledge, skill or attitude in their clinical practice. Competency develops through stages of expertise from novice to proficient (CanMEDS, 2015).

Cultural safety

An outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the healthcare system. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe (First Nations Health Authority).

Health equity

The absence of avoidable or remediable differences among groups of people, ensuring that all people have full access to opportunities that enable them to lead healthy lives, such as: quality affordable healthcare, education, safe housing, social support networks, public policy, etc. (EQUIP Health Care, 2017).

Health-care provider (HCP)

A person who is licensed, certified or registered under the Health Professions Act (1996) and/or other prescribed Acts to provide Health Care in British Columbia. Other professionals not covered under the Health Professions Act, such as Paramedics, may be included in this definition.

Privacy

In a healthcare context, privacy is how a health organization collects, uses, discloses, stores and secures personal information in accordance with B.C. privacy laws.

Security

In a virtual health context, security is the act of protecting computer systems, networks and data from cyber-attacks. This is done through safeguards including security awareness education, policies, industry best practices, procedures and software controls.

Virtual health

A care model focused on connecting patients, families and providers, using technology to optimize wellness, enhance care, and improve outcomes. (PHSA Virtual Health Handbook). Examples of virtual health include but are not limited to clinical digital messaging, remote patient monitoring, video remote interpreting (VRI) and audio-video health visits. PHSA has adopted the term 'virtual health' to represent this type of care, but numerous other terms are used in BC, particularly 'virtual care.'

Collaborators

Obtaining patient and family partner input was a goal from the beginning of this project. Patients and families are generally not invited to participate in developing competency frameworks as frameworks are clinical in nature. Given the importance of outcomes for patients using virtual health, PVH took an innovative step and ensured patient voices were heard for this project. Just as with our clinical collaborators, our patient and family partner contributions are embedded in the following framework.

We are thankful for the time and expertise of our clinical collaborators:

We are equally thankful for the time and expertise of our patient and family partners:

Leon Baranowski	BCEHS	**Siwon Kim**	Professional Practice	Josh Bach
Lindsay Barton	BCCDC	**Andrea Knox**	BCC	Angela Bond
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Jagbir Kaur	BCC	**Dr. Jonathan Wong**	PVH	Angus Pratt
Cecilia Kim	PVH			Pam Young

DOMAIN 1: Virtual health practice requirements
Encompasses awareness and understanding of legal, regulatory, and organizational virtual health policies.

Competencies	Associated learning objectives	Resources
1a. Demonstrates an awareness of the legal and regulatory requirements and practice standards that inform and guide delivery of virtual health.	• Identify where to find legal, regulatory, certifying body practice standards. • Reflect on the respective standards, requirements and policies. • Describe jurisdictional implications from legal and regulatory bodies. • Describe regulated and unregulated care providers compliance expectations with virtual health resources.	College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC BC College of Nurses and Midwives College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia College of Physical Therapists of BC British Columbia College of Social Workers College of Speech and Hearing Health Professionals of British Columbia BC Society of Respiratory Therapists College of Psychologists of British Columbia College of Pharmacists of British Columbia
1b. Applies relevant organizational policies and decision support tools (DSTs) for safe and effective virtual health.	• Recognize when to use workplace virtual health policies and DSTs to guide practice. • Demonstrate adherence to the policies/DSTs.	Definition of Decision Support Tools PHSA Shop — your clinical program may list DSTs and Policies here PHSA Policy Office Contact your practice leader for more information on applicable policies and DSTs.

DOMAIN 2: Technology for virtual health Encompasses an understanding of how to use organizational virtual health technologies appropriately and safely.		
Competencies	**Associated learning objectives**	**Resources**
2a. Demonstrates the knowledge and skills needed to use virtual health tools.	• Recognize the appropriate equipment and supplies needed to use virtual health tools for yourself and your patients. • Apply the skills and knowledge needed to use the technology appropriately and safely. • Recognize how to access support services when needed and/or trouble-shoot challenges for yourself and your patients. • Demonstrate how to optimize the use of virtual health tools to achieve efficient and effective virtual health.	PHSA Zoom for Healthcare Resources BC Provincial Virtual Health Toolkit HSO — Accreditation Canada COVID-19 Toolkit Zoom Patient Manual Patient Virtual Health Care Tech Support (bottom right corner of page) Zoom for Virtual Health Visits Manual PHSA Virtual Health Handbook — Choose the right solution Canadian Medical Association: Patient Virtual Care Guide Virtual Care Playbook — Scope of Practice
2b. Demonstrates an awareness and understanding of the privacy, security and safety features of virtual health tools.	• Demonstrate how to maintain privacy and security of patient information per specific solution (e.g. review terms of use for each applicable VH solution). • Apply the broad principles of information privacy and security across the patient journey (e.g. from appointment booking to virtual visit to documentation to referral and consultation). • Demonstrate how to report breaches in privacy and security appropriately.	Privacy and Confidentiality Policy Managing Privacy and Confidentiality Breaches Privacy and Security in Virtual Health Privacy and FOI Zoom for Healthcare — see Privacy and Security tab PHSA Virtual Health Handbook — Patient Confidentiality

DOMAIN 3: Equity-oriented care for virtual health Encompasses the ability to employ equity-oriented care in virtual health practice.		
Competencies	**Associated learning objectives**	**Resources**
3a. Applies principles of equity-oriented care to determine if virtual health can improve access or exacerbate barriers to care.	• Build knowledge and understanding of the principles of the social determinants of health and their implications to digital/virtual health. • Build knowledge and understanding of strategies to address Indigenous-specific racism and Black and People of Color racism in the virtual health setting. • Build knowledge and understanding of equitable and inclusive practice to address the needs of diverse populations (e.g. race, gender and sexual diversity, culture, ethnicity, ability, age or body type) in the virtual health setting. • Identify strategies to respond to the diverse economic and sociocultural barriers to virtual health (e.g. disparities faced by disabled, senior, low-income, limited English proficiency, low health literacy populations). • Identify strategies to promote meaningful patient, family and community engagement to inform virtual health practice.	EQUIP Health Care — Equity Oriented Care Canadian Public Health Association — Social Determinants of Health Health Canada — Enhancing Equitable Access to Virtual Care in Canada BC Patient Safety & Quality Council: Culturally Safe Engagement BCCDC Grand Rounds: Defining the Scope of Digital Public Health and its Implications for Practice and Research BCCDC Health Equity A Health System Approach to Reducing Inequities PHSA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Resources Transcare BC: Intro to Gender Diversity PHSA Anti-Indigenous Racism Response Training PHSA Balanced View: Addressing Weight Bias and Stigma in Health Care See resources listed under competency 4b (below).

3b. Advocates for and leverages resources to ensure access to virtual health.	• Advocate for your patient's access to the appropriate virtual health infrastructure and tools as needed. • Promote patient and population-level digital health literacy resources.	Health Advocacy Training for Health Professionals Canada Health Infoway — Digital Health Learning Program

DOMAIN 4: Delivery of virtual health
Encompasses knowledge and capacity to deliver safe, high-quality virtual health.

Competencies	Associated learning objectives	Resources

4a. Incorporate virtual health safely and appropriately into clinical practice.	• Recognize when a virtual health tool will complement, enhance or fragment care based on both clinical and equity-oriented assessments. This includes a consideration of the benefits and limitations of virtual care.
	
	    • Collaborate with patient and family to address individual circumstances and considerations in using virtual health.
	
	• Demonstrate the ability to maintain privacy, security and safety by incorporating consent processes, conducting visits in private spaces and verifying patient identifiers.
	
	• Identify potential interoperability issues (e.g. when working with two or more applications).
		PHSA Virtual Health Handbook:
		
		    Virtual health visits appropriateness considerations
		
		    Patient Safety
		
		    Patient Consent
		
		    Patient Confidentiality
		
		PHSA Virtual Health Policy
		
		PHSA Shop — your clinical program may list DSTs and Policies here PHSA Service Desk — 604-675-4299
		
		See resources under competency 2b (above).

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4b. Apply trauma awareness, cultural humility and sensitivity and harm reduction in virtual health practice.	• Build knowledge and understanding of the *First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness* and their implications to virtual health. • Build knowledge and understanding of trauma awareness, cultural humility and sensitivity and harm reduction and their implications to virtual health. • Integrate principles of trauma and violence-informed care, cultural humility and safety, Indigenous cultural humility and safety and harm reduction approaches in the delivery of virtual health services.	First Nations Health Authority: Indigenous Cultural Humility and Safety First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness Cultural Safety and Humility Key Drivers and Ideas for Change San'yas Course PHSA Indigenous Health Ethnomed Culturally Connected National Harm Reduction Coalition Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse — Trauma- and Violence-Informed Care Toward the Heart BC College of Nurses & Midwives — Indigenous cultural safety, cultural humility, and anti-racism College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC — Indigenous Cultural Safety, Cultural Humility and Anti-racism Practice Standard CATIE — Harm Reduction Fundamentals BCCDC's Harm Reduction Clinical Resources Trauma Informed Practice Resource Health Standards Organization — B.C. First Nations, Métis and Inuit Cultural Safety and Humility Standard See resources listed under competency 3a (above).

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4c. Support patient's and family's informed decision-making on the risks and benefits of virtual health.	• Explain the limitations of virtual health (e.g. patients may request virtual health visits due to convenience but they are not always appropriate, as in when an examination is required or privacy cannot be maintained). • Discuss applicable risks and benefits (e.g. data may be stored and / or accessed outside of Canada.) • Follow evidence-based program- specific guidelines/SOPs to support the appropriate delivery of virtual health.	PHSA Virtual Health Handbook: Patient Consent Virtual Health Practice Course PHSA Shop — your clinical program may list DSTs and Policies here HSO — Accreditation Canada COVID-19 Toolkit Canadian Medical Association: Virtual Care Playbook — Scope of Practice Canada Health Infoway — Benefits and ConsiderationsPHSA Virtual Health Handbook: Benefits and Limitations of Virtual Health Solutions Contact your practice leader for more information on applicable policies and decision support tools
4d. Determine what technological supports patients and families need when using virtual health tools.	• Demonstrate the ability to respond to the needs of persons with visual or hearing disabilities or cultural or linguistic preferences (e.g. use of interpreters, translation of instructions on interfaces) • Assess (e.g. technical readiness) and support digital health literacy and offer basic technological troubleshooting (e.g. real-time training) and performance tips (e.g. blurred backgrounds or private space to enhance confidentiality; use of headphones for improved sound).	Patient Virtual Health Care Tech Support (bottom right corner of page) Canada Health Infoway — Digital Health Learning Program Provincial Language Service Digital Health Literacy Course PHSA Zoom Manual — Virtual Background

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	• Promote access to patient support services for virtual health (e.g. Patient Virtual Health Care Tech Support Desk).	
4e. Communicate clearly and respectfully in the virtual health environment.	• Develop the knowledge and skill to apply effective and evidence-based communication strategies and webside manner to improve the virtual health visit (e.g. clear, simple statements; slower pace; eye contact; appropriate pauses). • Appreciate the different types of communication (e.g. oral, written, and relational) that may be required in the virtual setting. • Ensure accessibility features and language services are utilized appropriately to support two-way communication. • Demonstrate respect for patient and family views on health and wellbeing.	PHSA VH Handbook: Virtual Health Webside Manner R.E.D.E to Communicate Skills Checklist Enhancing your webside manner

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4f. Demonstrate the skills and judgement needed to safely and effectively complete a virtual health clinical interaction.	• Elicit patient narrative with both open-ended questions and focused questions on specific concerns. • Utilize creativity skills to enhance clinical assessments when appropriate (e.g. invite patients to perform tasks in their home environment or invite a family member or home care provider to the meeting). • Identify other relevant clinical information needed for the virtual health visit (e.g. integrated data — check information systems as needed for lab results, diagnostic tests, etc.) • Identify when further clinical information is required for an appropriate assessment in a synchronous and asynchronous clinical setting (e.g. for remote patient monitoring, obtain additional biometrics or vital signs). • Validate patient understanding to ensure appropriate summation of interaction (e.g. teach-back).	Institute for Healthcare Improvement — Teach-back Method R.E.D.E to Communicate Skills Checklist Enhancing your webside manner

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4g. Recognize and respond appropriately to the patients' emotional, psychological, social and physical needs in the virtual health environment.	• Identify the need to escalate care immediately (e.g. call 911). • Demonstrate therapeutic skills in the virtual setting. • Demonstrate coaching skills and a supportive attitude. • Recognize that it may take additional efforts to ensure a positive relationship in virtual health care delivery (e.g. given the distanced nature of virtual health, additional efforts may be required by clinician to express empathy or demonstrate respect for patient's time). • Utilize keen observation and relational skills to interpret non-verbal and verbal expression in the virtual health environment.	Motivational Interviewing Centre for Collaboration, Motivation & Innovation Enhancing your webside manner Expressing Empathy IHI Tips for Expressing Empathy via Telemedicine R.E.D.E to Communicate Skills Checklist

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4h. Provide effective patient and family support and share education and follow-up recommendations in the virtual health environment.	• Utilize virtual health tool functionalities, multimedia and other materials to support teaching and sharing of follow-up recommendations (e.g. whiteboard, videos). • Apply effective teaching strategies in the virtual health environment. • Employ local processes to order prescriptions, labs or diagnostics or to arrange subsequent follow up appointment (e.g. eFax to pharmacy, enter diagnostic/lab tests, referral to Allied Health or appointment request into the electronic health record).	PHSA Zoom Manual Institute for Healthcare Improvement — Teach-back Method New Knowledge and Innovation Learning Tools and Resources Teaching in a Digital Age
4i. Integrate into virtual health practice the appropriate referral process and documentation standards to ensure quality care.	• Record and maintain documentation standards as appropriate. • Demonstrate the ability to send referrals efficiently and safely in the virtual environment.	PHSA Documentation Policy PHSA Virtual Health Policy Soon to be released New PHSA Virtual Health Policy PHSA Virtual Health Handbook — Documentation Contact your practice leader for program specific guidelines on documentation. Refer to documentation standards of applicable health professions college.

Virtual health competency framework updates:

Version	Date Updated	Updated by	Specific items changed
1.0	Original release date July, 2022		
1.1	January 31, 2023	Ben Lee Mehreen Poonja Diane Underhill	Link included in key definition of Cultural Safety
			Competency 3a: Added the associated learning objective: • Build knowledge and understanding of equitable and inclusive practice to address the needs of diverse populations (e.g. race, gender and sexual diversity, culture, ethnicity, ability, age or body type) in the virtual health setting. Added the following resources: • PHSA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Resources • Transcare BC: Intro to Gender Diversity • PHSA Anti-Indigenous Racism Response Training • PHSA Balanced View: Addressing Weight Bias and Stigma in Health Care
			Competency 4a: Added the associated learning objective: • Collaborate with patient and family to address individual circumstances and considerations in using virtual health.
			Competency 4b: Updated the link for Health Standards Organization — B.C. First Nations, Métis and InuitCultural Safety and Humility Standard
1.3	January 23, 2024	Jordan White	• Updated contact email to: PVHeducation@phsa.ca • Updated broken links, including: • phsa.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/provincial-virtual-health/practice-education

			• Updated any mention of OVH to PVH after rebranding from Office of Virtual Health to Provincial Virtual Health
1.4	March 31, 2025	Sogol Tafteh	• Added the table of contents • Adjusted formatting