



## HEALTH INNOVATIONS

NAME OF PRACTICE: E-mental health

JURISDICTION: National

HEALTH THEME: Service Delivery

HEALTH SECTOR: Mental Health

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: July/August 2017

MHCC to explore how e-mental health can overcome barriers to accessing care

The growth of communication technologies is exploding, and, along with it, the development of effective digital interventions to address mental health problems and illnesses. Despite the clear potential for this technology to connect people with the health services they need, it is not being fully realized in Canada.

“A lot of our work at the Commission starts with a question,” says Louise Bradley, MHCC President and CEO, who points out that e-mental health can be as effective as face-to-face treatments, cut down costs and cut across time zones. “Why aren’t we using it to the fullest?”

To help answer that question, the MHCC gathered a team of experts under the leadership of Dr. Patrick McGrath of the IWK Health Centre, to conduct an environmental scan to uncover the barriers to implementation of e-mental health, and to highlight opportunities for knowledge sharing.

“This is a new frontier for mental health,” says the MHCC’s Manager of e-Mental Health, MaryAnn Notarianni. “Technology is used extensively throughout health care, but when it comes to applying digital tools to mental health specifically, there’s been a lag. We want to help close that gap.”

The scan, which was conducted in concert with a literature review, uncovered a vacuum in national, strategic leadership, and pointed to the need for models of costing, staffing, training and implementation.

“This is a seismic shift,” says Bradley. “But we don’t have a choice. Waitlists are soaring. People are desperate for help. Yes, there are challenges. But I view a challenge as an opportunity in disguise.”

To help promote the uptake of e-mental health and advance its application, the MHCC put out a call for proposals in early July, to implement and evaluate an evidence-based demonstration project to improve access to mental health services.

“E-mental health needs to be part of a broader service model,” says Notarianni. “To do that, we want to understand how e-mental health can overcome barriers to access to services.”

The outcomes focused demonstration project will help a promising e-mental health innovation scale up, and evaluate its effectiveness in reducing wait-times and/or geographic barriers.

The project, which will take place over two years, will be informed by the environmental scan, which pointed to a need to reach new patients, and a lack of comfort with new technologies among clinicians and service providers.

“If we want to expand the reach of e-mental health services for all Canadians, we need to evaluate their effectiveness,” says Bradley. “This demonstration project is very exciting because it stands to prove an effective means to get people seen more quickly, and reach them where they are.”

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

NAME: H  l  ne C  t  

TITLE: Senior Communications Advisor, Public Affairs

ORGANISATION: Mental Health Commission of Canada

EMAIL ADDRESS: [media@mentalhealthcommission.ca](mailto:media@mentalhealthcommission.ca)

TELEPHONE NUMBER: 613.857.0840

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