

Considerations for the delivery of occupational therapy services through electronic means

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The practice and delivery of occupational therapy (OT) services through electronic communication technologies is becoming increasingly prevalent. The use of communication technologies enables increased access to OT services for individuals living in rural and remote areas as well as increased access to unique/specialist OT services for all clients, regardless of where the client or OT are physically located.

With the recent COVID-19 pandemic, there is also increased need to employ electronic communication technologies to allow for continuity of OT service provision while protecting the health and safety of the public and health care providers.

The use of electronic communications such as telephone or video conferencing as an alternative to face-to-face service delivery is also referred to as telehealth, telerehabilitation, telepractice, virtual health, remote service delivery, online service delivery, etc.

Data privacy and security

When health professionals engage in the provision of services remotely, they are expected to be aware of and comply with all regulatory expectations and legislation that applies to their practice and to deliver services that meet the same expectations for quality, competent care as services delivered in-person.

ACOT [Standard of Practice](#) 1.2 requires OTs registered to practice in Alberta *“be knowledgeable of and adhere to all relevant public protection legislation, regulatory and professional legislation, bylaws, standards of practice, and code of ethics applicable to his/her/their occupational therapy practice.”* ACOT [Code of Ethics](#) indicator 1.6 requires OTs to *“safeguard client information from unwarranted disclosure.”*

As such, the move to remote delivery of health services should be undertaken carefully. Privacy is paramount when delivering OT services in-person or through electronic means. To protect the transmission of personal and health information, the chosen application must provide end-to-end security and comply with the legislative requirements that apply in your situation. Depending on your employer or with whom you are contracted by to provide services, you will either need to adhere to the requirements outlined in Alberta’s *Health Information Act* (HIA), the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPP) and/or the *Personal Information Privacy Act* (PIPA).

Alberta’s Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner (OIPC) has prepared an advisory document on electronic communication with clients:

https://www.oipc.ab.ca/media/1001934/Advisory_Electronic_Patient_Communication_Jun2019.pdf

Although not all OTs work for employers listed as custodians or affiliates under the *Health Information Act*, the recommendations in the OIPC document are considered best practice to ensure the security of the personal and health information of your clients.

Refer to the OIPC site for [resources](#) and the [latest advisories](#) on how you can protect the health and personal information of your clients.

Application functionality

ACOT cannot recommend or endorse any particular videoconferencing application, service or platform.

When choosing a videoconferencing application, you will want to consider:

- Privacy (i.e., encryption needs and/or potential hacking) and security settings
- Cost of the application
- Available features and technical supports offered (e.g. to assist with troubleshooting, during sessions)
- Your own and your client's home technology/wireless and/or data capacity
- Speed of transmission – available bandwidth (can vary across the province and may be particularly stressed during the pandemic resulting in pixelated/freezing video and/or choppy audio)

Regardless of the application selected, be mindful of:

- What services can you reasonably offer - while some screening, consultative, or psychosocial interventions may lend themselves well to virtual provision, other services may not be possible or might need to be modified.
- Your competence to provide the services remotely – ensuring you have the knowledge, skills and ability required to deliver services virtually.
- Facilitation/support on the remote end – does someone need to be available to support the client with their technology or activities?
- Dedicated space (location) – ensuring content can't be overheard by others for both yourself and your client.
- Your liability insurance coverage – confirming with your insurance provider that you are covered to provide OT services virtually.

Client consent

Registered OTs are expected to obtain informed consent from their clients when there is a change in mode of service delivery. Consent does not need to be in writing – it can be verbal. In all cases, consent must be documented in adherence with ACOT's Standards of Practice. The process of informed consent should include discussion about risks and limitations associated with the delivery of services remotely.

ACOT would like to acknowledge the Alberta College of Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists (ACSLPA) and Physiotherapy Alberta – College and Association (PACA) for sharing their content for this practice advisory. Please also refer to their guidance documents: [Telepractice information for ACSLPA members](#) and [PACA Telerehabilitation guide](#).