

COVID-19 SHEDS LIGHT ON NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR ONLINE THERAPY AND COUNSELLING

This research aimed to determine the benefits and limitations of online therapy and counselling as experienced during COVID-19 - a period of unprecedented intensive use. Research was conducted with 17 therapists, counsellors and MHA organization leaders between August 11 and September 9, 2020. Literature review included 40+ relevant articles, studies and reports.

Key Findings

Highest likelihood of effectiveness

- ⇒ Individuals with mild early onset anxiety and depression and a support system in place
- ⇒ Individuals on wait list for residential, inpatient or other intensive in-person treatment
- ⇒ Individuals who successfully completed intensive treatment and are returning to a safe and supported environment
- ⇒ Individuals with frequent contact with family or specialist physician for other illnesses

Lowest likelihood of effectiveness

- ⇒ Individuals who have experienced severe trauma
- ⇒ Individuals who are low functioning
- ⇒ Individuals who do not have access to a private space
- ⇒ Individuals who are socially deprived and/or have no support system in place

Other key findings

- ⇒ Significant concern for marginalized groups if in-person funding is de-prioritized post COVID-19
- ⇒ While convenience is an important benefit, it is not, on its own justification. Decisions must be based on what is therapeutically appropriate.

Recommendations

- ⇒ Community to create a set of draft guidelines for the use of online modalities NOW to be refined over time as research evolves
- ⇒ Continue research to prove out highest and lowest likelihood scenarios
- ⇒ Invest in training for family physicians to more effectively diagnose, treat, and refer patients
- ⇒ Continue to advocate for investment in an underfunded, fragmented and stigmatized mental health and addiction system; especially in under-served communities
- ⇒ Government and community to work together to develop a set of measures to evaluate effectiveness of both online and in person therapy and counselling to inform decisions, measure the impact of investments, and create alignment of goals and priorities.
- ⇒ Government to recast its plan by socioeconomic sector to ensure that all Ontarians have equitable access and quality of care.