Digital Health Literacy - Member Proposal

Proposed policy

On the occasion of the acceptance of the Global Digital Health Resolution at the 71st World Health Assembly on May 21, 2018, and in support of its call to global communities and member states to adopt digital health to improve health access and quality of care, the Canadian Medical Association will advance digital health in Canada through collaboration with provincial and territorial medical associations (PTMAs), health professionals, patients and caregivers, the academy, the private sector, and other interested actors and stakeholders to improve the quality of health care and our citizens’ access to it by:

• Increasing the awareness and involvement in digital health literacy our key stakeholders: citizens, health professionals, health administrators and health policy-makers

• Accelerating evidence-informed health policy translation to support health policy-makers and health administrators in adopting digital health

• Disseminating best practices in digital health in clinical care in support of the health and wellness of patients, caregivers and health professionals

• Advocating for the establishment of a digital health observatory in Canada to help health researchers and evaluators to prospectively collect evidence to inform future developments

• Facilitating global partnerships to support the World Health Organization’s 2018 Global Digital Health Resolution

Rationale for proposed policy

The Canadian health care system experiences significant gaps in access, quality and cost effectiveness. Digital health — the use of digital technologies to deliver health services and capture data for population health — brings fresh solutions to our health system challenges. The general public is increasingly interested in digital health technologies such as health apps, wearables and patient portals.

The general public and health professionals need digital health literacy — the awareness of and knowledge for appropriate use of digital health solutions — to ensure they are not overwhelmed or misguided as they make choices about using the rapidly increasing solutions in the digital health marketplace. People need unbiased guidance and physicians must be a trusted source of meaningful advice and direction.

The future of health care precision medicine and data analytics will require us to establish a digital health foundation of electronic health records, population health tracking and monitoring technologies. Our health professional workforce needs to be ready to deliver digital health services in the future.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently passed a resolution on digital health, calling for member states to implement digital health strategies. Canada must contribute to this global movement. The CMA and its members can spearhead the digital health transformation now. Physicians as experts and leaders have the unbiased health knowledge and skills to support our patients and colleagues in digital health uptake and to partner with our governments and private sectors to transform our health system. If we abdicate our leadership responsibility, our profession risks becoming irrelevant in the digital health age.
Supporting evidence

Inequitable access to treatment, long waiting times and interprofessional team-based care are global challenges that Canada and other countries face in our health care systems. https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/global-views-healthcare-2018

The C.D. Howe Institute recently published a paper to illustrate different ways digital health can improve health care access, quality and productivity and called for modernizing our Canadian health system. https://www.cdhowe.org/public-policy-research/modernizing-canadas-healthcare-system-through-virtualization-services

The 2018 report of Canada Health Infoway, Connecting Patients for Better Health, highlights the latest availability and use of digitally enabled health services (e-services) and citizens’ interest in accessing their health information online. Infoway is developing the ACCESS Gateway platform to support citizens in accessing digital e-services. https://www.infoway-inforoute.ca/en/component/edocman/resources/reports/benefits-evaluation/3564-connecting-patients-for-better-health-2018

In 2018 the World Health Assembly passed a resolution calling for member states to advance digital health implementation to achieve health care for all. http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA71/A71_ACONF1-en.pdf

The World Medical Association, which is a proponent of telehealth and mobile, issued a 2017 statement on guiding principles for the use of telehealth for the provision of health care. https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-statement-on-guiding-principles-for-the-use-of-telehealth-for-the-provision-of-health-care/

The 2018 CMA Health Summit featured digital health. Before the summit the CMA issued a background paper that documented how digital health is transforming health care, providing evidence and suggesting solutions. CMA can lead by creating and supporting worthwhile digital health innovations and best practices and by advocating for digital health literacy among citizens, health professionals and health policy-makers, informed by evidence and without bias. https://cmahealthsummit.ca/