



Research Review

Using Telemedicine with Offenders: A Promising Practice

KEY WORDS: *telemedicine, health care, mental health, offenders*

What it means

Research suggests that the use of telemedicine to deliver health services, especially mental health services, to offenders is a promising practice. While more research is required, there are considerable potential benefits to its use, including improved access to care and cost-savings.

What we found

Correctional jurisdictions have been using telemedicine with offenders since the 1990s. It is most commonly used for psychiatry and other mental health purposes.

Offenders report that they are generally satisfied with their participation in telemedicine. Offenders may even prefer telemedicine to on-site providers for certain issues (e.g., sexual concerns). Benefits include improved safety for the community and staff by decreasing the number of offender off-site visits, decreased wait times to access care (particularly for specialists and in remote areas), and cost savings via decreased travel to off-site appointments. Initial research suggests cost-savings per use range from \$8 to \$14 per visit and one study found the cost of initial set-up can be recouped in 4 years.

Potential challenges identified include resistance from staff, high start-up costs, lack of technical expertise to ensure the technology operates well, difficulties dealing with offenders who become frustrated or angry during an appointment, and complexities in coordinating appointment times.

What we looked at

Telemedicine is being used in some areas within the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). To provide the Health Services Sector with further information on this practice in other correctional jurisdictions, the academic literature in this area was reviewed and summarized.

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