

Bridging the Digital Healthcare Gap

Promoting Equitable Access to Digital Healthcare for Urban-Dwelling Older People

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Findings from our project highlight potential opportunities for seniors centres to better support older people's digital health needs.

Background

Digital healthcare has the potential to reduce health disparities by improving access for underserved groups, including older people, but these populations often face significant barriers to accessing and using these technologies, potentially exacerbating health inequities instead (1,2).

Despite evidence supporting community-based models to improve digital health access and health outcomes for low-income older people in rural areas (3), there is limited research on their effectiveness in urban settings in Canada.

Objectives

The aims of our project were to:

- (1) Understand the digital health needs of 411 Senior Centre Society's members.
- (2) Identify potential community-based strategies to improve the adoption and access to digital health services.
- (3) Explore how 411 Senior Centre Society can build on existing programs and develop new partnerships to better support older people's digital health needs.

Definition: Digital Healthcare

"The use of information and communications technology in support of health and health-related fields" (4).

Approach

The project was undertaken as part of a broader initiative led by 411 Seniors, aiming to identify and capitalize on opportunities to enhance the organization's capacity to meet the health needs of its members. Findings are informed by:

- (1) A series of short interviews with 411 Senior Centre's members, staff, and board members (n=X).
- (2) An environmental scan focused on community-based approaches to addressing older people's digital health needs.

Recommendations

Seniors centres are inclusive, accessible community spaces, well-positioned to support older people's access to digital health services:

- Incorporate digital health skills learning into their existing digital skills programs, equipping older people with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to access reliable health resources and navigate digital health platforms.
- Create confidential virtual care access points within seniors centers, supported by trusted staff/volunteers, could help address barriers to accessing digital health services.
- Explore opportunities to develop supported virtual/hybrid access to specialist healthcare for older adults within senior centres, integrated with existing services to facilitate self-management of health.

Analysis: Key Themes



Improve confidence and proficiency in using technology to access health information and digital healthcare services.

Enhancing Digital Literacy



Ensuring access and continuity of care is vital for older people. Digital health services help to mitigate barriers to health services, but they must also effectively address the challenges many older individuals encounter in accessing and utilizing technology.

Improving Access to Digital Health Services



Digital healthcare offers significant opportunities for older adults with chronic health issues. Seniors centres complement this by promoting and facilitating self-management strategies and support.

Supporting Self-Management

References

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