

Submitted by: ForaHealthyMe Inc.

I submit the following comments with the hope that this is more than just another way for a government agency to check a box and say, "Job done."

While I am not optimistic, as a founder, my hope that the information I present, and the discussion will lead to real change and opportunity for companies like mine to participate in addressing the problems and gaps within the wider Canadian health system.

For years, innovators and other partners have been trying to press the agenda for the adoption of virtual care technology solutions as a model of care.

Who We Are

ForaHealthyMe Inc. develop and license a suite of Remote Care Virtual Solutions.

Our solutions equip health providers with tools including telehealth & tele-rehab technology to support patient care across a variety of chronic, acute and mental health care issues.

Based in Markham, Ontario, we are a Canadian owned and operated company. All R&D is conducted in Ontario with partners including the Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Hamilton Health Sciences, Toronto Rehab Institute, Southlake Regional Health, Spinal Cord Injury Ontario and York University.

These engagements have results in successful trials and demonstrations of the value and impact of virtual care solutions. Results include:

- Increased access to care
- Moving the center of care away from the hospital and into the community
- Demonstrated cost savings
- Improvements in patient satisfaction
- Improve quality of life etc.

For several years, we have spent countless hours attempting to engage with Federal and Provincial agencies to raise awareness of the potential of virtual care technology solutions.

ForaHealthyMe Inc. has benefited from several grants to develop innovative virtual care solutions.

Funding agencies include IRAP, CIHR, FedDev Ontario, NSERC.

Yet, these applications have difficulty being commercialized. The process is broken.

At the core of the issue impacting companies like ForaHealthyMe is the ability to scale in Canada. Unless we can win business in our own country, we cannot build a track record or establish growth to scale. Investors want to invest in companies with growth potential.

Failing to attract investment results a loss of IP, a loss to the health system and a failure to inject dollars into the Canadian economy. The adoption of our solutions by the NSH will enable the creation of channels through which companies with innovative solutions can have their technology vetted /procured by the health system.

A few key points:

Healthcare SMEs are unable to successfully compete and win business in Canada Government programs that fund innovation do not go far enough to enable adoption and commercialization Large

conglomerates and publicly traded multinationals will always have the advantage because of their relationships and resources.

The Process

The system and the process has fostered innovation among SMEs, but has failed to reward those SMEs by enabling commercialization of innovative products. Instead, the procurement processes seem to reward publicly traded multinationals. Those entities have the resources to lobby, and win government contracts to deliver services. This means that SMEs cannot gain market access.

With reference to the May announcement regarding funding for mental health virtual care solutions. "The Government of Canada has committed to investing \$240.5 million to support the expansion of virtual care and mental health tools across the country." I wish to state that, "Steps have already been taken to deploy digital health care solutions to Canadians during the current pandemic."

However, the policies to support the adoption of publicly funded R&D projects should be modernized to "further support the development and deployment of digital solutions."

"This will help ensure that Canadians have access to innovative, and increasingly necessary, virtual health care products and services. "

In other words -We do not need to reinvent. Clinically validated applications already exist. What we need is a pathway to have our solutions adopted.

I will provide a clear example below.

Example of an existing solution - Funded 4 years ago by the CIHR

For instance, one of our projects was funded by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) under the eHealth Innovation Partnership Program.

This program was designed to enable collaboration between academic, industry and the health system to develop innovative solutions in two areas- Aging at Home and Youth Mental Health.

Against the background of the prevalence of diagnosable mental illness is growing on North American university campuses, the results of a trial concluded that Internet-based mindfulness CBT-based interventions, can result in significant reductions in symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress in a student population.

My company collaborated with York University, CAMH and North York General Hospital.

The results of the three-year randomized controlled trial (RCT) conducted by researchers from York University's School of Health Policy and Management in partnership with ForaHealthyMe Inc. was published in the Journal of Medical Internet Research- Mental Health.

Titled an Eight-Week, Web-Based Mindfulness Virtual Community Intervention for Students' Mental Health: Randomized Controlled Trial, the study investigated the efficacy of a Mindfulness Virtual Community intervention in reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among undergraduate students in Toronto, Canada. The secondary outcomes included quality of life, life satisfaction, and mindfulness.

Results

The study successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of an internet-based mindfulness-based interventions in reducing depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms in a student population.

Yet, this product has faced a difficult time being commercialized.

We have attempted through Min. Mary Ng to understand how we could deploy our solutions to address gaps in care related to COVID-19 and to "help ensure that Canadians have access to innovative, and increasingly necessary, virtual health care products and services."

In keeping with the theme of mental health there is an urgent need for solutions to address the issues related to youth mental health across the country. The impact on population health (mental and physical) of COVID-19 will be felt for decades to come. We (Canada) are not utilizing the best resources or made in Canada solutions to address the issues.

This view is reinforced by the recent UNICEF report states Canada ranks poorly in the well-being of children. -Canada ranks 30th out of 38 wealthy countries, amplifying concerns about post COVID-19 child and youth well-being in Canada.

This report simply points to the need for innovative resources to address the gaps. We have spent billions of dollars into youth mental health, yet, it does seem to be working. I think it's time for a new approach.