

Myths About Patient Access to Digital Health Results

Digital health is transforming the way Canadians access health care as more and more are able to view their personal health history online. It has also changed workflows for clinicians who are able to pull up information about their patients as needed and whose patients may now be able to also access their health information. This has created some uncertainty and concerns — not always based on the facts — about what digital health means for patients as well as clinicians. Canada Health Infoway set out to dispel some of these myths.

MYTH #1: Doctors will be flooded with calls if patients have access to their lab results online.

FACT: Patients who have access to their lab results online are less likely to call their physicians while waiting for results and they're less likely to have an in-person visit related to their results. Additionally, patients who have access to their health information through a patient portal are less likely to call or make requests for information, with one Ontario study finding a 61% decrease in requests for information when a patient portal became available.

Source: Impacts of direct patient access to laboratory results – Final Report, August 2015, SRDC. Ontario Shores' HealthCheck Patient Portal Benefits Evaluation Report, 2016. See also: Group Health Centre's myCARE Benefits Evaluation Plan, 2016.

MYTH #2: If patients are able to view lab test results online before talking to their doctors, they will be overly anxious.

FACT: Patients who view their results online are no more anxious than those who wait to learn about them in person. A study showed 93% of patients who accessed their lab results online said they had more informed discussions with their doctor. Additionally, patients with one or more chronic conditions were less likely to report being anxious.

Source: Mák G, Smith Fowler H, Leaver C, Hagens S, Zelmer J, "The Effects of Web-Based Patient Access to Laboratory Results in British Columbia: A Patient Survey on Comprehension and Anxiety," J Med Internet Res 2015;17(8):e191 DOI: [10.2196/jmir.4350](https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.4350)

MYTH #3: I won't understand my lab results if I access them online because they are too complicated.

FACT: In a study, 76% of patients who first saw their lab results online were confident they understood the results.

The study also showed patients who view their results online are no more anxious than those who don't. In fact, people with chronic conditions are less anxious when they get their results online. Timely access to lab test results is an important part of patient engagement and empowerment, which are directly linked to improved chronic disease management.

Source: Mák G, Smith Fowler H, Leaver C, Hagens S, Zelmer J, "The Effects of Web-Based Patient Access to Laboratory Results in British Columbia: A Patient Survey on Comprehension and Anxiety," J Med Internet Res 2015;17(8):e191 DOI: [10.2196/jmir.4350](https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.4350)

MYTH #4: Patients don't want to see their health information and won't find the information useful.

FACT: Currently, 79% of Canadians say they can access or would like access to their health information online.

Furthermore, Canadians who do have access find it beneficial. In one study, 94% of patients who use portals said they valued viewing their health information online. In another study, 74% of Canadians with access to digitally-enabled health services say it helps them have more informed discussions with their doctor.

Source: Connecting Patients for Better Health: 2018. myCARE Benefits Evaluation and Final Report, Group Health Centre, 2016.

MYTH #5: Digital health is only for the young and tech savvy

FACT: Canadians are very connected, including seniors. 90% of Canadian households have Internet access and 74% of Canadians over 55 years old own a smartphone or tablet.

Digital health also offers important opportunities for advancing care for seniors through programs such as telehomecare. Telehomecare can help seniors with chronic conditions improve their quality of life and reduce the number of ED visits and hospital stays they may have.

Source: Diffusion of Smart Devices for Health in Canada — Final Report, September 2017. 2018 Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA) Factbook, <http://bit.ly/2MZR1Pp>. See also: <http://bit.ly/2MZyDpX>.

MYTH #6: The government and insurance companies will be able to see my digital health records.

FACT: All provinces and territories in Canada have laws that protect the confidentiality of your personal health information. Governments and insurance companies do not have access to the identifiable information in your digital health records. There are only certain circumstances (lawful purposes) such as public health situations or when you have provided consent, when your identifiable data may be disclosed to them.

For more information, see: <http://bit.ly/2YM4WQu>

MYTH #7: Canadians don't have online access to their health information.

FACT: In 2019, most Canadians could access their personal health information electronically — a significant increase from 2015. Provincial and regional portals are now available for all citizens in Quebec, Alberta and Saskatchewan as well as many in Ontario and British Columbia. Many Canadians in British Columbia and Ontario have also been accessing their lab results through lab service providers.

Source: 2018-2019 Annual Report, Canada Health Infoway.

MYTH #8: Digital health will marginalize populations who may not have online access.

FACT: Canada is one of the most connected nations in the world and 90% of Canadians have Internet access. Additionally, many Canadians face barriers to accessing care — and virtual care helps reduce those barriers.

Digital health can also reduce marginalization for people living in remote communities or with mobility issues. For example, some Canadian initiatives and programs support access to certain populations by providing smartphones or remote monitoring equipment to participants.

Source: 2018 Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA) Factbook, <http://bit.ly/2MZR1Pp>. For more information, see: <http://bit.ly/2lsEVgR>, <http://bit.ly/2mmhsIE> and <http://bit.ly/2MGCCJq>.
