

November 5, 2020

Dear Colleague,

This past week has been Manitoba's most serious yet during this pandemic. Hospitals are close to being overwhelmed, new restrictions are in place, some health services are being postponed, and patients are more worried than ever.

Among all this change and uncertainty, I am writing to you with an important update that will help you stay connected to your patients.

We have finally obtained approval from the provincial government to expand virtual care.

I know the limited virtual care options have been a source of significant stress for physicians. The tariffs approved early in the pandemic helped initially with follow up care, but as weeks turned into months they have not been sufficient to allow you to stay connected to your patients, particularly the elderly and patients with more complex issues. We know these patients need to take extra precautions as they are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, and yet their ongoing medical needs still need your attention and care.

Today I am happy to report that additional virtual visit tariffs are now available to help you.

The latest virtual visit tariffs approved by government include:

- Comprehensive assessments as a virtual alternative to complete exams by both specialists and family physicians (equivalent to in-person tariffs 8540, 8503, 8504, 8543, 8544, 8424 or 8500)
- Age modifiers to support virtual visits with the elderly (equivalent to in-person tariffs 8425 and 8513)

These new virtual visit tariffs are available effective November 1, 2020. The same rules that already apply to the existing virtual visit tariffs also apply to these as well.

We recognize that there are still other virtual tariff supports that could benefit the profession and we continue to engage government.

With all regions in Manitoba now at code orange or red, additional restrictions are now in place across the province. Shared Health has issued guidance advising community and outpatient practices to shift to offering two thirds of their visits virtually. These new tariffs will support you in achieving that target, helping to limit your patients' in-person contacts during this surge in COVID-19 cases. It also allows you to reduce your in-person contacts without sacrificing patient care, reducing your risk of exposure.

You will find complete information about the new tariffs at [DoctorsManitoba.ca/virtualcare](https://doctorsmanitoba.ca/virtualcare). You will also find a quick start guide and other resources to help you adopt and optimize the use of virtual care in your practice. As always, the team at Doctors Manitoba is available to answer your questions. You can reach them at covid19@doctorsmanitoba.ca.

These tariffs are but one of the supports physicians need right now. We know this pandemic is impacting physicians in different ways and there is a need for better access to testing, support if you need to isolate because of exposure or illness, and help with obtaining PPE. All physicians are extremely concerned about hospital resources being overwhelmed, and our anxiety continues to be heightened unnecessarily because the details of the provincial pandemic contingency plan have not been available. Surgeries and diagnostic procedures are being canceled again. We continue to work on all of these issues and more.

I ask all physicians to please continue bringing your concerns and issues to Doctors Manitoba. We are working on a number of issues with provincial officials and this advocacy is not limited to tariffs or economic interests. We are acting on your advice and concerns, sometimes less visibly as we directly engage with provincial officials, and sometimes more publicly through the media and in other ways. For example, we are launching a brief but intensive public awareness campaign to urge Manitobans to stay home and limit their contacts in an effort to help protect our hospital resources.

As a colleague, and as someone with family and friends who rely on physicians, I want to recognize the dedication and courage of the medical profession through this pandemic. As COVID-19 cases surge, I know the sole motivation of the over 3,000 doctors in this province is to protect the health and well-being of all Manitobans. Your constructive advice is always useful, and should be invited and embraced now more than ever.

Your actions inspire me every day, and on behalf of all Manitobans I want to thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cory Baillie".

Dr. Cory Baillie
President