

Topic Overview

Sharing Health Information with Older Adults through Online Resources in Canada

Citizen panel
22 November 2014

The McMaster Health Forum convened a citizen panel on the subject of sharing health information with older adults through online resources in Canada. The panel was organized with the support of McMaster University's Labarge Optimal Aging Initiative. The panel brought together 11 citizens from across the region covered by the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network to examine the problem, options for addressing it, and key implementation considerations.

Discussing the problem

Participants discussed the challenges of sharing health information with older adults through online resources. During the deliberations, the following six challenges were consistently raised: 1) older adults have diverse internet habits; 2) older adults are struggling to find credible health information that is grounded in the Canadian context; 3) older adults are struggling with information overload; 4) many older adults are not in the mindset of using online resources, while others have physical and cognitive limitations; 5) many older adults have complex care needs, making it even more challenging to find relevant and personalized information; and 6) the health system is not currently designed to support older adults in using online resources to find health information

The views expressed in the panel summary are the views of panel participants and should not be taken to represent the views of McMaster University, McMaster University's Labarge Optimal Aging Initiative, or the authors of the panel summary.





Eleven citizens from across the region covered by the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network gather during a McMaster Health Forum event on 22 November 2014.

Discussing the options

Participants reflected on three options (among many) for sharing health information with older adults through online resources in Canada: 1) developing an online one-stop shop for older adults and their informal/family caregivers that provides timely access to the best available health information; 2) developing and implementing community outreach programs that aim to improve older adults' (and their informal/family caregivers') e-health and digital literacy; and 3) developing and implementing healthcare provider training programs that ensure providers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to be able to support their patients' use of online resources. Several values-related themes emerged throughout the discussion about these options, including user-friendliness and simplicity, personalization, contextualization, credibility, transparency, accessibility, consistency, accountability, standardization, quality and efficiency. Participants favoured option 1, although they acknowledged the need for options 2 and 3, and suggested these options be significantly simplified to ensure they are feasible.

Discussing the implementation considerations

Participants focused on six key barriers to overcome to implement the options: one-stop shops must compete with existing sites; simplifying health information for people with multiple conditions is difficult; providers face time and resource constraints; providers may be unwilling to promote useful online resources; rural and remote communities are difficult to serve; and the costs of the options may be prohibitive. Participants felt that the most important facilitator was the fact that the world is moving toward online resources already, which will make the options necessary in the future. Other potential facilitators to implementing the options included simplifying them to ensure feasibility (particularly for options 2 and 3), and engaging credible partners (e.g. well-known academic institutions) and those in other government sectors (e.g. social services, the ministry of education).

Panel deliverables

To learn more about this topic, consult the [citizen brief](#) that was presented to participants before the citizen panel and the [summary](#) of the panel. For an electronic copy of the citizen brief or panel summary, visit our website www.mcmasterhealthforum.org.



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