

# VIRTUAL VISITS TOOLKIT

APRIL 2020



Helping people use technology to see and connect with their families during the COVID-19 pandemic is absolutely critical. Never before have residents in long-term care and retirement communities felt more isolated and removed from normal life. The mental and emotional well-being of many is at stake.

## AN ORGANIZED METHOD FOR SETTING UP VIDEO CALLS BETWEEN RESIDENTS AND THEIR LOVED ONES DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, families and friends of residents are not permitted to visit their loved ones living in long-term care and other senior-focused dwellings.

Many teams around the country have mobilized to set up video calls using tablets, smartphones, and laptops for residents and their families. This is exactly what needs to be done. To make video calls a reality, seniors need assistance accessing devices they may not own, Wi-Fi connections they

do not have, and the know-how to navigate technology. We all know this is not as simple as picking up a telephone to call someone. There are many moving parts and several things that can go wrong.

This toolkit has been developed to help any long-term care or retirement residence team to take on the task of setting up scheduled video calls between seniors and their loved ones. A team of professional technology

educators and senior-focused community organizations prepared the content. They were actively informed by frontline examples of video-calling initiatives that have launched with success since the COVID-19 pandemic started.

If you think your organization or any senior-centred community you know would find value in this resource, please share it freely, far and wide. The more people we can help connect through technology, the better!

### WHAT'S NEEDED TO ORGANIZE VIDEO CALLS?

- A space with reliable Wi-Fi or Wi-Fi available throughout the community
- A device such as an iPad, a Samsung tablet, or a laptop with a webcam
- Staff or volunteers who can schedule video calls with families
- Staff or volunteers to help porter residents and operate the device



## WHAT BARRIERS ARE OFTEN IN THE WAY?

### POOR WI-FI SIGNAL SOLUTIONS

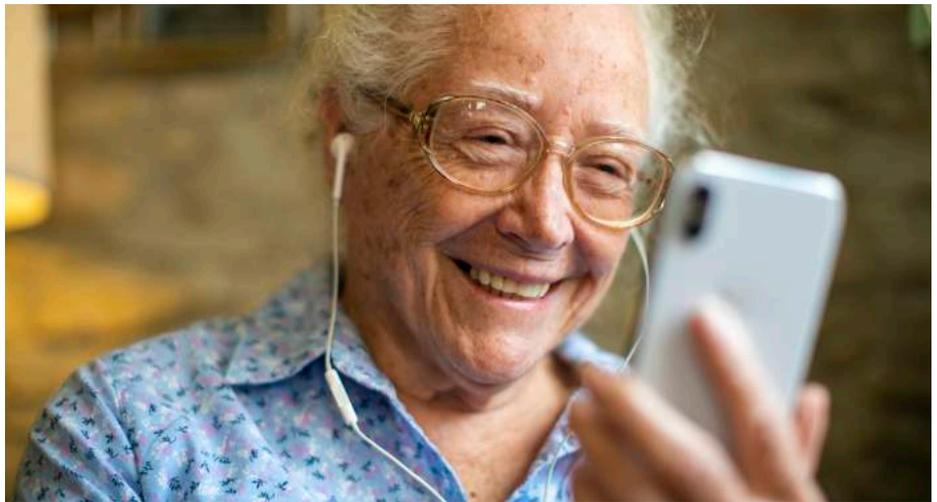
- 1 - Call the Internet service provider that supplies your community with public Wi-Fi and ask to increase the bandwidth and connection speed to accommodate more use.
- 2 - Obtain a smartphone with a data plan organized and paid for by your organization, and create a temporary Wi-Fi hot spot.
- 3 - Ask every family if they would mind contributing to a Wi-Fi solution for the community, like a wireless hub from a cellphone provider.

### NO DEVICES AVAILABLE SOLUTIONS

- 1 - Realign recreation or marketing budgets to fund the purchase of a device.
- 2 - Ask every family if they have any old, unused and still-functioning devices that they could lend or donate to the community. Or perhaps a family member could buy a new one for the community to share.
- 3 - Ask your team if they have any functioning devices to lend or donate to the community specifically for video-call use.

### NO HELPERS AVAILABLE SOLUTIONS

- 1 - Ask a teammate to donate some break time to help schedule calls with families.
- 2 - Recruit volunteers to help.



## FOCUS ON FINDING SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR HUMAN RESOURCE AND TECHNOLOGY ISSUES

It's clear that many communities are lacking in one area or another when it comes to organizing successful video calls. Please search for a way to overcome these challenges. Be creative and think outside the box. Don't hesitate to ask others for help in ways you've never done before.

Two key resources are the resident council and family council within each residence. Can council members vote to use funds available to purchase a device or improve Internet connectivity within the community? Are any family council members available to volunteer their time to help organize and facilitate video calls within the community for residents?

Family members can play a significant role when looking for support. Don't be shy! Ask everyone, not just family council members, if they can contribute. It could be as simple as setting up the schedule for calls between residents and their loved ones, which could be done from home. Or perhaps they have two hours a week to volunteer their time to operate a tablet to make the video calls possible for those eager to connect with their families.

Finally, are there tech-savvy residents or staff members who can help—and perhaps lend out—devices?

Only those who seek solutions to their issues will find them.

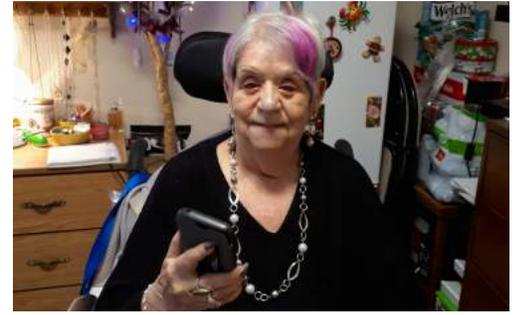
## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Q:** What's the best way to clean devices and spaces used for video calls?

**A:** We suggest minimizing the number of people touching devices. Consider designating one person to do so. Ask residents to not touch devices while on calls. After each use, wipe the device down with a standard sanitizing wipe. It will not damage the device. Also wipe down any carts, tables, chairs and other items used. Keep things super clean!

**Q:** I want to do this, but I'm not sure I can get everyone on board. What do you suggest?

**A:** Emphasize the benefits this will have for both residents and families. Start with "yes" in your mind, and work backwards to make it happen. Tell your team that Internet access has been deemed a human right by the United Nations (2016). Insufficient Internet connectivity is a human rights issue, and it creates avoidable obstacles to supporting the psychosocial needs of residents.



## PROMISING PRACTICES

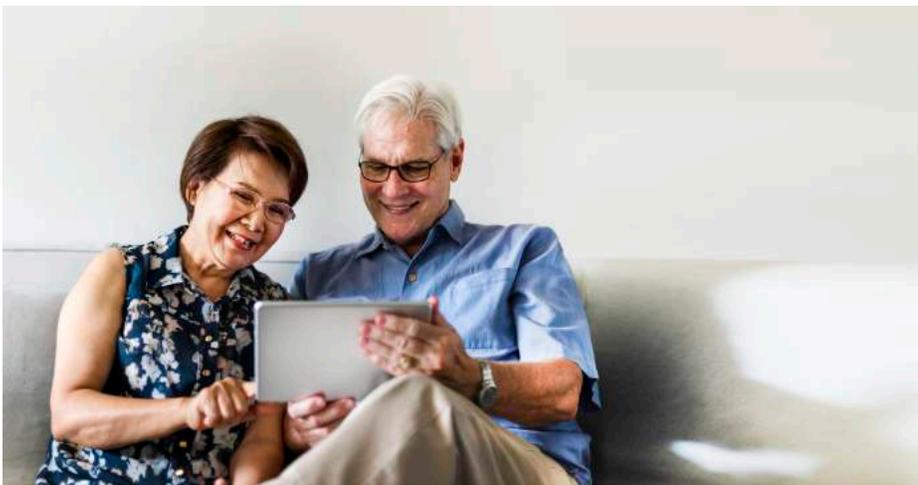
### DEVICES AND APPS

Virtual visits have been a success at communities utilizing Apple and Android-based tablets and smartphones. Generally speaking, devices that cost around \$200 (new) work well for video calls. Apps that have been most effective and easiest to organize with family members include Skype, FaceTime and Zoom. Avoid using headphones!

\*Instructions for using each app have been included with this toolkit for both staff and families.

### SAFE SPACES FOR CALLS

Where does the Wi-Fi work best? Can residents leave their floor? Quite often, Wi-Fi is set up to work best in particular public rooms. Organizing calls in this room one at a time is a good idea. Closing the door to give participants privacy is important, when possible. If residents are restricted to their specific floor, organizing calls to happen in the doorway of their suites might be a good option. If privacy is a concern, perhaps moving further into the suite is possible, while still accessing available Wi-Fi.



## ACCESSING WI-FI AND STAYING ON SCHEDULE ARE OFTEN THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES

Helping individuals move to rooms where Wi-Fi is available takes time and resources. It contributes heavily to falling behind the set call schedule organized with family members, and it can stop a video call outright if the space becomes unavailable. We highly recommend organizing a Wi-Fi connection available everywhere in the building, similar to a public library. Internet access at libraries, seniors' centres, and coffee shops is always FREE!

## SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

This schedule should help you start slow, achieve small wins, and provide time to address any barriers or roadblocks. If you feel ready to jump ahead, go for it!

**Day 1:** Establish your Wi-Fi and device-availability situation. If you require guidance, webinars about using video-calling tools like Skype and Zoom will be available upon request. Find one resident that would like to video call their family as your trial run. Schedule the call with the family for the following day. We recommend 30-minute virtual visits.

**Day 2:** Do the first virtual visit with the resident and their family. If everything goes well, set up another video call for a resident and their family for the following day. If you encounter any problems, please reach out to us for guidance.

**Day 3:** Repeat “Day 2.” If successful, schedule two video calls for the following day. If not, try again until you succeed.

**Day 4:** Complete the two scheduled calls. If they work well, set up two additional calls for the following day.

**Day 5:** Complete the two scheduled calls. If they go smoothly, decide how often each week you can offer virtual visits to residents and families. Determine a call schedule, and start offering the call schedule to residents and their families. We recommend keeping track of the call schedule in a spreadsheet you can easily share via email with anyone helping schedule the calls.

**Week 2:** Building on your first week, continue facilitating scheduled virtual visits as frequently as possible. Consider how to get the good word out about the availability of the video calls (e.g., newsletters, email blasts) and build out a schedule several days in advance with residents and their loved ones.

Our team is happy to help communities with any technology questions and to provide guidance on how to get a video-calling initiative started for your residence. Please email any of the individuals listed below to set up a phone call and/or free webinar training, and we’ll do our best to support you on this journey.

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