



National Collaborating Centre
for Determinants of Health
Centre de collaboration nationale
des déterminants de la santé



Digital Equity for Mental Health and Addictions Services in NS

What is Digital Equity? It "seeks to ensure that everyone—especially groups who are historically underserved or underrepresented—has the information technology capacity needed for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services."

(Canadian Commission for UNESCO, Digital equity [Internet]. Toronto (ON): University of Toronto, St. Michael's College; Media Ethics Lab [cited 2021 Nov 2]. [about 5 screens]. Available from .[REF](#))

What is the Digital divide? It "is about equity, not infrastructure... Issues of digital equity are deeply rooted, connected, and systemic... It is essential to respond to divides with care; they existed prior to current technologies and can be exacerbated by new ones... Innovation that isn't inclusive becomes the agent of further inequity."

(Ahmed N, Harper-Merrett T. The 'digital divide' is about equity, not infrastructure [Internet]. Toronto (ON): Ryerson University, First Policy Response; 2020 Nov 13 [cited 2021 Nov 2]. [about 6 screens]. Available from .[REF](#))

Why Digital Equity?



When COVID-19 hit, the shift to digital health services represented "... a double-edged sword... (where) socioeconomically and medically vulnerable populations that could stand to benefit most from telehealth may be the least ready to use it" Because the uptake of digital health services reflected the intersection of individual, community, and structural barriers, it quickly became obvious that "widescale implementation of telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic may reinforce disparities in health access in communities that stand to benefit most from its use"

Chang JE, Lai AY, Gupta A, Nguyen AM, Berry CA, Shelley DR. Rapid transition to telehealth and the digital divide: implications for primary care access and equity in a post-COVID era. *Milbank Q.* 2021 Jun;99(2):340–68. doi: 10.1111/1468-0009.12509.. [REF](#)

"It is important to ensure that providing digital opportunities does not expand the disparity and inequality between the 'haves' and the 'have nots', and thus, continuing and carefully targeted efforts need to be devoted to closing digital divides"

Livingstone S, Lemish D, Lim SS, Bulger M, Cabello P, Claro M, et al. Global perspectives on children's digital opportunities: an emerging research and policy agenda. *Pediatrics.* 2017 Nov;140(Suppl 2):S137–41. doi: 10.1542/peds.2016-1758S.. [REF](#)

"... the convenience of virtual is not always (best), when we're dealing with human interactions, and people suffering from depression who need to summon the mental fortitude to also deal with technology... challenges with (muting and unmuting), background noise, etc. Layer those on to someone trying to access support for depression, and it becomes an insurmountable obstacle... the human connection is challenged in digital forums"

National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health. Digital equity for mental health and addictions in Nova Scotia: a situational assessment [Internet]. Halifax (NS): Nova Scotia Health, Mental Health and Addictions Program; 2021 May 11 (updated 2021 Nov 5; cited 2021 Nov 2). 54 p. Available from .[REF](#)

"There is a segment of the population, including those who are homeless, disabled, or very low income, who may not have access to any digital means of communication. These very vulnerable people will need to know that such a service exists, and a private place and access to the digital means to use these services, and potentially assistance to access them as well, including transportation and instruction or physical assistance to use the digital equipment."

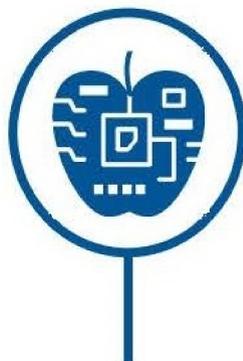
National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health. Digital equity for mental health and addictions in Nova Scotia: a situational assessment [Internet]. Halifax (NS): Nova Scotia Health, Mental Health and Addictions Program; 2021 May 11 (updated 2021 Nov 5; cited 2021 Nov 2). 54 p. Available from [REF](#)



Call To Action

“As digital channels are increasingly used across the health care continuum, questions remain about who is benefitting and who is being left behind... It cannot be assumed that everyone will benefit equally or fairly, and [there are questions] as to whether these efforts, without mitigation, are increasing inequities or creating unfair or unjust pathways to care ”

National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health. Digital equity for mental health and addictions in Nova Scotia: a situational assessment [Internet]. Halifax (NS): Nova Scotia Health, Mental Health and Addictions Program; 2021 May 11 (updated 2021 Nov 5; cited 2021 Nov 2). 54 p. Available from [REF](#).



ACCESS
FACTORS THAT INHIBIT PEOPLE FROM ACQUIRING, SAFEGUARDING AND USING DIGITAL DEVICES

AFFORDABILITY
OF DEVICES AND DATA/HIGH SPEED INTERNET

DIGITAL LITERACY
ABILITY TO SEEK, FIND, UNDERSTAND, APPRAISE AND APPLY DIGITAL INFORMATION

RELEVANCE
CONTENT, FORMAT, MODE OF DELIVERY AND OTHER CULTURAL AND SOCIETAL FACTORS

SAFETY AND SECURITY
KEY TO ENSURING TRUST IN DIGITAL SERVICES

Key considerations in the 5 dimensions of digital equity

ACCESSIBILITY
What is necessary to ensure that everyone has equitable access to the platforms and devices needed to participate in digital health programs and support?



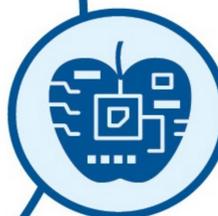
AFFORDABILITY
What government sectors and community organizations could be partners to develop policies to ensure sustainable economic resources for digital inclusion for all?



SAFETY & SECURITY
What strategies can be used to build community trust and ensure privacy and safe spaces for use of digital health services?



DIGITAL LITERACY
How can digital literacy education and training to be tailored to socioeconomic circumstances among people using digital health services?



RELEVANCE
How can community members co-design and co-create digital mental health policies that reflect lived experience of inequities?



National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health and Nova Scotia Health Authority. (2021). Digital equity in health services: practice brief. Antigonish (NS): NCCDH, St. Francis Xavier University; <https://nccdh.ca/resources/entry/digital-equity-in-health-services>