

E-prescribing helps First Nations toward improved healthcare

BY MAUREEN TAYLOR

The COVID-19 pandemic shone a bright light on the pervasive disparities in health care access across Canada. It also highlighted the importance of leadership and resilience in overcoming challenges arising from inequities.

In the 2020 Public Health Agency of Canada report, *From Risk to Resilience: An Equity Approach to COVID-19*, Dr. Theresa Tam acknowledged the importance of Indigenous leadership, resilience and success during COVID-19.

Successes exemplified by First Nations on reserve included lower COVID-19 hospitalizations (8.4 per-

cent compared to 13.4 percent for general population), and lower death rates (1.4 percent compared to 7.1 percent) for reported cases.

Working for an Indigenous organization, I am witness to the resiliency and strength of First Nations communities every day and I am continually impressed with the effectiveness of their efforts and actions.

While advancing health equity and reducing disparities amongst different populations has to be a key part of advancing systemic improvement, the more intangible elements of resilience, leadership and social cohesion are also important.

It is not just about having a particular gap or disparity resolved, but

also about who bridges the gap and how it is to be done. This is just as true in the health technology sector in which I work.



Maureen Taylor

In my work with Mustimuhw Information Solutions (MIS), an Indigenous software development

company fully owned by Cowichan Tribes, we take part in the “digital journeys” of the First Nations we work with. This is a journey with our customers and their provincial and national partners to implement access to digital health tools.

A good example is a journey that MIS and Canada Health Infoway participated in together with First Nations across the country called the National Community Electronic Medical Record Expansion.

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tool called the Mustimuhw Community Electronic Medical Record (cEMR). Numerous efficiencies, improved care coordination and client safety outcomes were realized for communities as a result of their efforts. It is this journey that creates the change, and those making the journey that close the gap or resolve a disparity.

As with any successful journey, it really has become part of a larger or continued transition. Having a digital health foundation has enabled communities to mobilize around other areas to improve health care access. Currently, we are actively involved in leveraging e-prescribing tools like Canada Health Infoway's PrescribeIT, which are especially beneficial in remote and rural communities where the prescriber or pharmacy (and sometimes both) are not local, because it reduces the need for in-person physician or nurse practitioner visits.

PrescribeIT helps provide safer and more efficient medication management by connecting community-based prescribers to community pharmacies, enabling the digital transmission of prescriptions. This virtually eliminates the risk of lost or damaged prescriptions and also reduces the risk of forgeries, a significant concern in the face of the national opioid epidemic.

With e-prescribing, the back and forth over fax and phone whenever questions arise is replaced by a secure, clinical communications tool that sends the pharmacist's question directly to the physician's EMR system and vice versa.

This allows pharmacists and prescribers to quickly align on an appropriate course of action and provide the best medication for the patient. By improving communication and accuracy in the prescription process, e-prescribing also reduces the potential

By improving communication, e-prescribing can reduce medication misuse and improve adherence.

for medication misuse and improves medication adherence for better health outcomes.

As an Indigenous digital health service provider, our focus is on supporting resiliency by being part of a First Nation's journey. There are no magic solutions to issues of health equity, but there is magic in what can be achieved when travelling together.

Maureen Taylor is the chief operating officer of Mustimuhw Information Solutions Inc. (MIS), a technology solution provider for Indigenous health, child and family services and patient access.