

Electronic Social Work Practice

Electronic social work practice includes the delivery of social work services through the use of any electronic device (such as a telephone, computer, tablet, smartphone) or any electronic format (such as the internet, social media, online chat, text, video, and email) and other electronic means.

There are many reasons why social workers may consider providing electronic social work services. Prior to providing electronic social work services, social workers must carefully review and consider the requirements of the Manitoba College of Social Workers (MCSW) [Code of Ethics](#), MCSW [Standards of Practice](#) and [Standards for Technology in Social Works Practice](#). In particular, the following Standards for Technology in Social Work Practice must be considered and addressed:

LEGAL ENTITLEMENT TO PRACTICE SOCIAL WORK IN JURISDICTION

Regulatory requirements vary across provinces. Social workers who reside in Manitoba and wish to provide services to clients in other jurisdictions must ensure that are adhering to regulatory requirements both in the jurisdiction of the client receiving service and the jurisdiction from which they are providing service. Social workers must contact the appropriate social work regulatory body for information regarding their registration requirements.

ASSESSED RISKS & BENEFITS OF ELECTRONIC SERVICES

- Does the client pose a significant risk of harm to self or others?
- Does the client have a cognitive impairment that would make electronic communication unrealistically difficult?
- Are there language, cultural or other barriers that would make face-to-face communication important?
- Do the social worker and the client have an agreed upon plan for the client to receive face-to-face services with the social worker or another practitioner if/when needed
- Does the client need ongoing monitoring? Can this be accomplished via electronic social work services?

INFORMED CONSENT

- Does the social worker have a reliable means to confirm the identify of the person to whom they are providing services (and therefore sharing confidential client information)?
- Does the client understand and accepts the limitations of electronic social work services?
- Does the client have a private place from which to engage in electronic social work services?
- Do the social worker and the client have an agreed upon plan for reconnection in the event their communication method fails?

References:

Standard 2, Standards for Technology in Social Work Practice (STSWP), Ethical Use of Technology to Deliver Social Work Services

Under the current circumstances, the College understands that it may not be possible for social workers to obtain written consent in accordance with Standard 5.12. The College accepts that **social workers may be required to accept verbal consent** in some instances. If obtaining verbal consent, social workers must document this verbal consent and the reasons written consent was not obtained. Where possible, email verification of consent would be considered best practice.

COMPETENCE TO PROVIDE ELECTRONIC SERVICES

- Does the social worker have the additional skills required to provide electronic social work services? For example, can the social worker competently assess the client's affect without seeing them or seeing them only via video?
- Does the social worker have the skills to manage the technology being used? Has the social worker assessed the client's capacity to use the technology?

EMERGENCY PLANS

- Can the social worker respond to the client rapidly, if/when needed?
- Is the social worker knowledgeable of the emergency and crisis services available in the client's vicinity and able to obtain these services for the client as needed?

TECHNOLOGY

There are a number of technology programs available to facilitate electronic service delivery. Social workers must consider security and confidentiality when selecting the best platform to meet their needs. The College does not recommend, approve or limit the use of any particular platform. Consultation with other social workers providing electronic service and communication with clients regarding their access to particular programs may be helpful.

PROFESSIONAL LIABILITY INSURANCE

In accordance with section 22 of the Social Work Profession Regulation, all social workers are required to be covered by professional liability insurance. If providing electronic social work services, social workers must ensure that their plans include cyber insurance.

References:

Standard 2, Standards for Technology in Social Work Practice (STSWP), Ethical Use of Technology to Deliver Social Work Services