

STRENGTHENING REHABILITATIVE CARE

Supporting post-pandemic renewal

2019–2022 Report



Rehabilitative
Care Alliance

Rehabilitative care is an essential element of Ontario's health system.

For individuals, rehabilitation can improve health outcomes, reduce disability and help older adults remain independent and in their homes.

For the health system, rehabilitation plays a crucial role in shorter lengths of stay, improved patient flow, and reduced hospital readmissions and emergency department visits.

The Rehabilitative Care Alliance (RCA) is working with more than 400 health system leaders and front-line clinicians across the province to achieve these outcomes—outcomes that take on renewed importance in the context of COVID-19. Through focused, collective action, the RCA is strengthening and standardizing rehabilitative care and actively supporting the work of post-pandemic recovery and renewal.



Through high levels of engagement with sector stakeholders and consistently leveraging the best available evidence, the Rehabilitative Care Alliance has effectively advanced rehabilitation provincially for patients and providers through development of care pathways, data and evaluation systems, and best practices.

Roy Butler | President and CEO
St. Joseph's Health Care London



Supporting management of COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 condition

In the early days of the pandemic, little was known about COVID-19 and how best to treat it. The RCA and GTA Rehab Network quickly established a regularly updated, [online collection of resources](#) and an online community of practice to share information and ideas on rehabilitative care in the context of COVID-19.



What we've achieved

Helping providers to improve care for people with COVID-19

The RCA has also been active in addressing care for those with post COVID-19 condition. To assist primary care providers, the RCA collaborated with Ontario Health on [Post COVID-19 Condition: Guidance for Primary Care](#) to include guidance on when to refer these patients to rehabilitation.

The RCA also created a standardized [referral form](#) and [intake pathway](#) for post COVID-19 outpatient rehab programs, as well as a [comprehensive provincial listing](#) to help primary care providers find these specialized programs.

Supporting pandemic planning for community-based rehabilitation



What we've achieved

Supported pandemic planning for community-based rehabilitation

The early days of the pandemic led to the closure and reduction of community-based rehabilitation services across the province. To determine the impact of these changes on capacity, the RCA surveyed organizations providing rehabilitation in outpatient/ community clinics and in-home settings on how they were responding to the needs of patients during the pandemic, including patients with post COVID-19 condition.

The surveys revealed a major reduction in operating capacity and patient volumes during the first three waves of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The surveys, a knowledge exchange event with stakeholders and the [summary report](#) informed pandemic planning for community-based rehabilitation and provided insights on health human resource challenges in the rapidly shifting pandemic context.

Assessing the pandemic's impact on rehabilitative care utilization

Rehabilitation plays an important role in supporting better outcomes for patients with COVID-19. To inform pandemic recovery planning, the RCA is analyzing utilization data to assess the impact of COVID-19 on rehabilitative care needs and to anticipate future demand.



What we've achieved
Determining utilization and best practices for patients with COVID-19 to support system planning

The RCA worked with the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES) to analyze rehab utilization data for patients with COVID-19 across the entire continuum of care (emergency department, hospital admission, ICU stay and subsequent rehabilitation needs). The RCA is also leading

a province-wide initiative focused on the use of outpatient rehab services by patients recovering from COVID-19. This initiative is the first to gather provincial data on a programmatic level and will provide a clearer picture of these individuals, their needs and the impact of outpatient rehabilitative care on their outcomes. The insights gained from both initiatives will aid in longer term COVID-19 recovery planning.

Helping OHTs integrate rehabilitative care in planning and service delivery



What we've achieved
Ensuring Ontarians receive the benefits of rehabilitative care

The RCA is engaging and supporting OHTs as key partners in the care continuum. As part of this work, the RCA developed *Patient and System-Level Benefits of Rehabilitative Care: A primer to support planning by OHTs and Ontario Health*. The primer provides an overview of

current evidence to help OHTs better understand how rehabilitative care can improve outcomes in primary care, hospitals and in the community. In addition to the more detailed primer, the RCA also created a **brief guide** to rehabilitative care for OHTs. These resources are part of the RCA's ongoing work to support OHTs in integrating rehabilitative care in the delivery of services to their priority populations.

Preventing functional decline among older adults with frailty



What we've achieved

Established a best practice framework for rehabilitative care for older adults living with/at risk of frailty to improve outcomes and support their journey from frailty to resilience

Evidence shows that rehabilitative care can improve outcomes for the growing number of older adults living with frailty. But until now, no single framework has provided a standardized approach to rehabilitative care across the continuum for this population.

To address this gap, the RCA and Provincial Geriatrics Leadership Ontario (PGLO) released *Rehabilitative Care for Older Adults Living With/At Risk*

of Frailty: From Frailty to Resilience. The framework outlines core elements and processes of care, along with recommended best practices. Early in the pandemic, the RCA also released a [summary guide](#) to best practice rehabilitative care for this population in light of COVID-19 restrictions. Many older adults were restricted to their homes, resulting in social isolation and physical deconditioning.

Preventing secondary falls among older adults with frailty

Falls are the number one reason for injury-related death, hospitalization and ED visits for older adults in Canada. Connecting older adults who fall with rehabilitative care is essential to mitigate further decline and prevent additional falls.



What we've achieved

Implementing post-fall pathways to mitigate functional decline and improve outcomes for community-dwelling older adults who fall

Recognizing this need, the RCA developed evidence-based post-fall pathways to help [primary care](#) and [EDs](#) assess the risk factors that contributed to the fall and stream patients to specialized geriatric services, rehabilitation provided through outpatient/community clinics or direct access to inpatient rehabilitation. Providers in Hamilton,

Sudbury and Thunder Bay [piloted](#) the pathways to determine the simplest and most effective ways to embed the pathways into clinical practice. To encourage adoption across the province, the RCA is now [supporting roll out](#) with an implementation toolkit, project management support and data analysis/reporting. EDs and primary care teams in northern Ontario have already signed on.

The RCA is also engaged in discussions with Community Paramedicine to adapt and pilot the pathway with community paramedics. Community paramedics are often called to assist people who have fallen, but if individuals choose not to be transported to a hospital, they may not receive follow-up. By implementing the pathway, paramedics can help people access appropriate rehab services to prevent another fall.

Supporting standardized best practices in post-surgical rehabilitative care



What we've achieved
Established standardized best practices for post-acute rehabilitative care to support better patient outcomes and increased efficiencies

The RCA continues to provide health service providers with detailed best practices to plan and deliver standardized rehabilitative care across the province.

In its earlier work, the RCA developed rehabilitative care best practice frameworks for patients with hip fracture and primary hip and knee replacements.

Best practices have now been released for simultaneous bilateral hip and knee replacement and shoulder arthroplasty, developed in collaboration with the former Health Quality Ontario.

This guidance has been key to supporting the rollout of bundled care across the province. As the pandemic reshaped health care, the RCA provided additional hip fracture and total joint replacement recommendations to align with practice changes due to COVID-19 protocols, including the widespread adoption of virtual care.

To further support providers, the RCA launched a centralized online resource of evidence-based resources that support best practice rehabilitative care for older adults with frailty who experience a hip fracture and individuals receiving a total joint replacement.

Promoting new models of community-based rehabilitation

Innovative and cost-effective models of community-based rehabilitation are improving patient outcomes and patient flow, but are not widely used across the province.

The RCA released a four-part white paper, Community-Based Rehabilitation: Providing High-Value Care in the Community, to explore the critical role



What we've achieved
Supporting the spread of innovative models of community-based rehabilitation to improve outcomes and enhance efficiency

that community-based rehabilitation plays in the Ontario health system. The paper provides examples of effective models (including virtual and hybrid models of care) and their outcomes when used in outpatient/community clinics and in-home and primary care settings. It also provides health system decision-makers with recommendations to support spread and scale of the models.



Home and Community Care Support Services has found tremendous value in coming together with system partners through the Rehabilitative Care Alliance to develop best practices for rehab patients. All partners have an equal voice, and through discussion, find opportunities to work together to provide high quality care.

Cynthia Martineau | CEO

Home and Community Care Support Services



Informing and improving system performance

The RCA led efforts to establish a standardized approach to evaluating rehabilitative care that supports system-wide improvement. Through its [system performance reports](#), the RCA provides an annual assessment of 14 rehabilitative care indicators across the province at a regional, sub-regional and organizational level.



What we've achieved
Implemented standardized evaluation to improve the quality of rehabilitative care services

The reports continue to evolve. Most recently, the RCA worked with the Ontario Hospital Association to launch a new [performance dashboard](#) in conjunction with the release of the 2020/21 report. Decision-makers and clinicians can assess their region's performance against provincial

benchmarks for three priority indicators or against the provincial average for 11 supplementary indicators. Where data is available, they can also drill down to a facility level and compare their organization's performance to other peer sites.

The RCA recently reviewed and refreshed the [RCA System Evaluation Framework](#) to re-align the indicators with the Quadruple Aim Framework and is working to apply a health equity lens to data collection.

Enabling the shift to virtual rehab



What we've achieved
Supporting effective use of virtual models to increase access to rehabilitative care

As a result of the pandemic, many organizations are integrating virtual and hybrid models of rehabilitative care into their service delivery on a more permanent basis. To ensure the quality of rehabilitative care remains consistently high, the RCA developed [Considerations for the Evaluation of Virtual Rehabilitation](#). The guidance

document provides an evaluation framework to ensure virtual or hybrid rehabilitative care is effective, efficient and producing the same or better outcomes as in-person models of rehabilitative care.

The RCA also hosted [two popular webinars](#) in spring 2020 to share practical information and learnings on providing virtual rehab.

Looking ahead

Since its inception in 2013, the RCA has made remarkable progress on standardizing rehabilitative care across the province, implementing evidence-based care and supporting system-wide improvements. With a newly renewed mandate from Ontario Health, the RCA will build on its work to date while launching new initiatives to reflect Ontario's evolving health care context.

Rehabilitation can—and should—play an important role in post-pandemic recovery. Working together, the RCA and its partners will ensure the benefits of rehabilitative care for individuals and the health care system are achieved—and that all Ontarians receive high quality rehabilitative care no matter where they live.



We have benefitted immensely from support from the Rehabilitative Care Alliance to implement both the Definitions Framework for Bedded Levels of Rehabilitative Care and the Post-Falls Pathway across our region, as well as from their support for emerging OHT work. This has allowed our health service providers, patients and care partners to benefit from best practice implementation support throughout our vast North East Region.

Jennifer Wallenius

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