Mobile Technology in the Field of Social Work

A Report for the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lean Services Division of the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is interested in determining the industry-specific best practices and tools for providing secure technologies to better support social work outside of the traditional office, to improve work mobility and productivity by provisioning the IM/IT tools that better enable practitioners to spend more time delivering face-to-face services, performing outreach work.

Research gathered from our literature review and cross-jurisdictional scan – including phone interviews with key informants – revealed that, without proper engagement of key stakeholders, the implementation of technology in the field can encounter resistance and ultimately hinder productivity; however, if a commitment is made towards including all relevant stakeholders in the design, development, and implementation of mobile technology, these barriers are much less likely to occur. Given that most jurisdictions are facing strong reluctance among social workers towards the use of some mobile technologies, it is evident that this necessary engagement with social workers and other crucial stakeholders is not happening. In the context of an ever-changing and evolving digital landscape, these are significant findings that deserve further attention and research. Resulting recommendations include:

1. The current model being deployed in Ontario best represents an example of the kind of engagement that follows the suggested practice-based methods of technology-integration in the field.
2. Manitoba and Saskatchewan provide alternative models of introducing technology in the field.
3. The specific model of tablet must be able to provide Wi-Fi, access to a VPN, as well as have access to the case management system provisioned by MCFD.
4. MCFD should anticipate challenges similar to that detailed by Saskatchewan and look to find tablets that are light-weight.
5. Commit sufficient IT resources to provide educational training and support to social workers using tablets.
6. A thematic qualitative study is needed to uncover the specific challenges that social workers are having with the technologies, to uncover the underlying barriers, and better understand how to meet the needs of social workers and their clients.
7. Take a collaborative, practice-led approach to integrating mobile technology in the field of social work. By involving social workers in the design, development and evaluation of mobile technology tools and software, there is a much higher chance of successful uptake.
8. Conduct formal evaluations that measure (and quantify) the efficiency and productivity gains of technology-use in the field.
9. Share the findings of your evaluations generously, so that provinces across Canada can learn from each others' successes and failures.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Historically, social workers gather information by taking written notes in the field or in a conference room and then return to their office to enter those notes into a secure database. This can be time-consuming and does not provide the real-time data, which is sometimes required in the field. While social workers in BC may be using multiple applications and devices, most of these been provisioned or created without consideration of work outside of the traditional office, and may not have appropriate protective measures to keep private information safe and secure.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this project was to determine the industry-specific best practices and tools for providing secure technologies to better support social work outside of the traditional office, to ultimately improve work mobility and productivity by providing IM/IT tools that better enable staff to work outside the office and spend more time delivering face-to-face services, performing outreach work.

1.3 Research Questions

To guide our data collection process, we had two research questions we sought to answer: (1) What is successfully and securely being done in the field to improve work mobility, productivity and practice?, and (2) What has been unsuccessful in the field to improve work mobility and why did it fail?

2. METHODOLOGY

Two complementary research activates were undertaken:

(1) Literature review

Literature pertaining to technology-use in the field of social work was accessed through various databases such as the University of Victoria's Academic Search Engine, Google Scholar, JSTOR, EBSCOhost, and SAGE journals. Keywords included: social work, mobile, technology, best practices, mobility, efficiency, productivity, and evaluation. Documents published in English from 1995 to present from Canada, Australia, and the United States were considered. Grey literature was accessed via Google search.

Upon initiation of the research process, it became clear that there is a dearth of publicly accessible information on the research topic, particularly with regards to studies or formal evaluations that could measure the efficiency and/or mobility gains before and after introducing technology in the field.

(2) Cross-jurisdictional scan

There are two components of the cross-jurisdictional scan: (1) cold-calling/emailing and (2) a formal Inter-Provincial Scan Request (IPSR), sent out by MCFD, on our behalf.

We began by using Google Search Engine it identify the applicable website addresses for the Provincial/State/Country websites. Using the contact information provided on these websites we phoned the organizations. If the call went to an answering message we sent an email request for participation in our research project and included the survey questions referenced in the Appendix. This approach yielded responses from three sources, the Alberta College of Social Workers (ACSW), the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers (SASW), and the Washington State Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). Our contact with these three organizations resulted in two over the phone interviews (ACSW and the Washington State chapter of the NASW), and the SASW filling out and emailing back our survey questions.

Having not gotten a satisfactory response rate from a "bottom-up" approach to information gathering we decided to take a "top-down" which entailed using the Google Search Engine to find government contact directory websites and using those websites to identify Government Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Directors that were responsible for Ministries or departments that were likely to have social worker programs. We then emailed those individuals directly asking for their help in our research. This approach yielded responses from Nova Scotia's Intergovernmental Relations Division in the Department of Community Services, Prince Edward Island's Policy Development Division in the Ministry of Child and Family Services, Ontario's Social Assistance Services Modernization Branch in the Social Assistance Operations Division in the Ontario Governments Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Strategic Policy and Intergovernmental Relations Division in the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services in the Queensland State Government in Australia. Our contact with these four organizations resulted in one over the phone interview (Ontario's MCSS), one filling out the questions used in our IPSR (PEI's MCFS) and two declines to participate.

Following our implementation of our "top-down" approach to information gathering we were contacted by another member of MCFD who offered to submit an Inter-Provincial Scan Request (IPSR) which contained six questions which were phrased differently than that of our original survey questions (see Appendix). This method resulted in five responses; from Alberta's Child Intervention Services division in the Alberta Children's Services Department, Saskatchewan's Program Effectiveness Division in the Child and Family Programs department in the Ministry of Social Services,

Manitoba's Child and Family Services division in the Department of Families, Ontario's Child Welfare Secretariat in the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and Newfoundland and Labrador's Department of Children, Seniors, and Social Development. Due to time and language constraints, we did not include Quebec in the scope of our research.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Current Context: Social Work in the Digital Age

Canada, along with much of the rest of the world, is arguably in the throes of the most rapid technological and cultural transformation ever faced by humankind; so profound that sociologist Manuel Castells (2011) has proposed that we have entered what he refers to as a "new form of society, the network society". In the span of just two decades, fundamental changes in communication and socialization patterns, facilitated by a revolution in technology systems. These technologies are now the "primary source of internet connectivity in industrialized nations" with over a billion smartphones in use worldwide (ACMA, 2013). Canada is rapidly transitioning to a point where the majority of the population will have powerful technology tools literally available at the touch of a button. In this context of rapid change and transformation, it is important that social work engages with the network society, embrace tools and practice that both utilizes the positive dimensions, as well as address (and combat) the potential negative aspects of technological change.

A historical view of social work suggests that, to date, the field of social work has developed a turbulent relationship with technological change; however our research findings suggest that this stems from the fact that technological change has primarily been *imposed* on social work practice across the globe (Barnett-Queen, 2001; Hill & Shaw, 2011; Humphries & Camilleri, 2002; Parton, 2006; Rafferty, 1997; Sapey, 1997; Watling & Rogers, 2012). Research suggests that taking a practice-led approach is critical to ensure that social workers themselves have a key role in working with other professionals to develop and implement new strategies to meet challenges may arise (Hill & Shaw, 2011). One thing is certain: the field of social work needs to embrace the inevitable rise of IM/IT tools, and welcome it with grace.

In this digital age, technology offers many benefits to clients – convenience, accessibility, and efficiency. That being said, technology also brings unique challenges, and social workers must be vigilant to maintain the privacy, confidentiality and boundaries in the client-professional relationship (ASWB, 2015). In 2015, Bowlen surveyed members of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and asked two simple questions: (1) "Do you think mobile technology would help you do your job?" and (2) "Is mobile technology for social workers a priority for your organization?" The results revealed that an overwhelming 96% of respondents believed that mobile technology would help them do their job, but only 55% thought that mobile technology was a priority for their organization.

Conflicting ideology of such a nature is expected to impact moral, and could ultimately lead to social worker burnout (Bowlen, 2015).

3.2 Potential Benefits of Technology in the Field of Social Work

There are several potential benefits of using technology in the field, but unfortunately there is minimal research done to formally evaluate and measure – or quantify – the productivity and efficiency gains, and other benefits; however the literature we were able to uncover did provide a solid starting point for discussion and further exploration.

Barber (2015) found that implementing mobile technology in the field of social work improved the quality of interaction between social workers and their clients, as social workers could easily update client and case information during visits and clients were then able to sign forms electronically during visits, streamlining the conventional paper-and-pen process. Three main benefits were identified in the study: (1) improved trust, (2) faster community referrals, and (3) real-time access to complete case history. Social workers reported that they initially were worried that their clients would be resistant to change, but "with today's technology where simply buying a gallon of milk means signing an electronic signature pad, there have been no issues from clients, and amazing productivity gains and stress relief for social workers" (Barber, 2015). Barber (2015) also found that social workers could be more engaged during meetings since tablet-use streamlined transcription and paperwork processes.

Bowlen (2015) found that mobile technology tools can decrease time spent on paper work; as one child protection services social worker put it, "You probably spend one-third of your time with families, and two-thirds of your time documenting everything that you've done." Social workers have become resigned to losing valuable time trying to work around paper-based processes, having to track down and locate paper files; that time could be spent out in the field providing the outreach work that their clients need. Hadfield (2007) found that mobile apps allowed social workers to spend more time in the field helping vulnerable children and adults. In addition, Bowlen (2015) identified that mobile technology enables social workers to have better access to information while they are working in the field. Despite the fact that many social workers find themselves hauling stacks of files and forms with them into the field, sometimes social workers find that they are missing necessary forms or information once it is too late (Bowlen, 2015; Hadfield, 2007).

Bradford Metropolitain District Council in the U.K. introduced mobile technology in 2007, in effort in increase social work efficiencies and ultimately allow for more face-to-face time with clients (Hadfeild, 2007). The pilot test was implemented since social workers reported that they were often unable to carry out some aspects of their jobs when they were out of the office since they could not access information that was held on the central database (Hadfeild, 2007). The

project enabled social workers to introduce electronic social care records for vulnerable children, and allowed workers to access e-mail, reports and case notes remotely via a secure 3G network (Hadfeild, 2007). The e-care manager at the council reported:

> "This flexible way of working enables us to deploy a mobility application that is both cost effective and efficient for us to manage . . . we were relieved to find on that worked for us . . . We are now seeing improvements in the level of service that we can offer citizens and can visit homes and access real-time information that makes a massive difference. It means we can be much more responsive to [client] needs and offer [social workers] a more flexible way of working" (Hadfeild, 2007).

3.3 Potential Challenges of Technology in the Field of Social Work

Stillman and McGrath (2008) highlight some of the challenges in integrating technological advances into contemporary social work practice, including infrastructure costs, integration with existing (often mandated) client management and reporting systems, as well as information privacy and security considerations. Social workers have a challenging role to understand their obligation to protect client privacy and confidentiality, while being familiar with exceptions (such as when mandatory reporting laws concerning abuse and neglect require the disclosure of information without client consent, or when laws require disclosure without client consent in order to protect a third party from harm) (Reamer, 2013). The rapid emergence and development of technology and electronic media used by social workers to deliver their services has added a new layer of challenging and unique privacy and confidentially challenges (Reamer, 2013). For instance, social workers that use email, live chat and video counseling must use sophisticated encryption technology systems to prevent breaches of confidentiality (i.e. hacking) by unauthorized parties, and comply with strict guidelines for prevention measures. Fortunately, there are many encryption technologies on the market that offer significantly more protection than do traditional paper documents (Hu et al., 2010; Reamer 2013).

In recent years, informed consent standards have been a major topic of discussion among social workers and other health care providers (Berg et al., 2001). The advancement of distance counseling and social outreach work has increased social workers' ethical duty to ensure that clients fully understand the nature of the services being provided, along with their potential benefits and risks (Reamer, 2013). This can become increasingly challenging in the context of MCFD, as special considerations must be made when minors contact social workers and request electronic services without parental consent. According to Reamer (2013), there are three key standards that must be met in order for consent to be considered valid: (1) Coercion and undue influence must not have played a role in the client's decision, (2) A client must be mentally capable of providing consent – some clients (for example, young children and individuals who suffer from serious mental illness

or dementia) are unable to comprehend the consent procedure, and (3) Online consent forms and procedures must be valid. Social workers sometimes present clients with general, broadly worded consent forms that may violate clients' right to be adequately informed (Recupero & Rainey, 2005; Reamer, 2013).

A common existing challenge in the field of social work is blurred boundaries in the practitioner-client relationship and/or dual relationships (Reamer, 2013). Key examples of this include "social workers' management of self-disclosure to clients, relationships with former clients, gifts and invitations offered by and to clients, barter for services, and relationships with clients in small and rural communities" (Brownlee, 1996; Campbell & Gordon, 2003; Daley & Doughty, 2006; Reamer, 2012). Using technology in the field may bring new challenges regarding relationship boundaries, as many social workers receive requests from current and former clients on social media platforms (Reamer, 2013). Electronic contact between clients and practitioners on social networking sites may lead to boundary confusions and ultimately compromise clients' privacy and confidentiality (Reamer, 2013). In addition, clients that have access to practitioners' social media profiles may uncover a great deal of personal information about their social worker. Moreover, Reamer (2013) highlights:

> "clients' postings on social networking sites may lead to inadvertent or harmful disclosure of private and confidential details. In addition, social workers who choose not to accept a client's "friend" request on a social networking site may inadvertently cause the client to feel a deep sense of rejection."

Some social workers combat this by having two networking profiles – one for professional use and one for personal use (Reamer, 2013).

3.4 Standards for Technology and Social Work Practice

Since social work's formal inauguration in the 19th centure, the profession has developed comprehensive ethical standards (Banks 2012; Barsky, 2009; Reamer, 2006b). According to Reamer, there are a wide variety of ways in which social workers are using technology to assist their clients – some are "reasonable, appropriate ethical uses of technology to help people who are struggling", but there are also ways that technology is misused, such as when privacy is breached (ASWB, 2015). To Reamer, "technology is like a baseball bat, which can be a thing of beauty when used appropriately and a horrible weapon when used to cause harm" (ASWB, 2015). Reamer emphasizes the importance of social workers and regulatory bodies being mindful of how documents and records are stored and how they are managed, since record-keeping "in the cloud" cannot be destroyed as easily as paper records; therefore, practitioners and regulatory bodies must develop solutions to issues surrounding improper or illegal conduct (ASWB, 2015). A number of compelling ethical issues are merging over the years as social workers making increasing use of a variety of digital and other electronic technology (Abott et al., 2008; Barnett, 2005). In effort to begin dialogue on technological concerns, and create a

standardized list of best practices, Reamer released "Model Regulatory Standards for Technology and Social Work Practice", in which the standards are divided into seven sections, with emphasis on providing social work competency guidance/training, record management, and electronic practice guidelines across provincial boundaries (ASWB, 2015).

The National Association of Social Workers and Association of Social Work Boards (NASW & ASWB) collaborated to outline Standards for Technology and Social Work Practice in 2005, which created a uniform document for the profession to reference when considering integrating technology into practice. The standards address such issues as privacy and confidentiality, competencies, documentation, and risk management. The standards apply to both the use of technology as "adjunct to practice" as well as to practice that is exclusively conducted with the use of technology, as outlined below:

(1) Ethics and Values: Social workers providing services via the telephone or other electronic means shall act ethically, ensure professional competence, protect clients, and uphold the values of the profession.

(2) Access: Social workers shall have access to technology and appropriate support

(3) Cultural Competence and Vulnerable Populations: Social workers shall select and develop appropriate online methods, skills, and techniques that are attuned to their clients' cultural, bicultural, or marginalized experiences in their environments. In striving for cultural competence, social workers shall have the skills to work with a wide range of people who are culturally different or who may be considered a member of a vulnerable population, such as people with disabilities and racial, ethnic, and sexual minority status, and those whose primary language may not be English.

(4) Technical Competencies: Social workers shall be responsible for becoming proficient in the technological skills and tools required for competent and ethical practice and for seeking appropriate training and consultation to stay current with emerging technologies.

(5) Regulatory Competencies: Social workers who use telephonic or other electronic means to provide services shall abide by all regulation of their professional practice with the understanding that their practice may be subject to regulation in both the jurisdiction in which the client receives services as well as the jurisdiction in which the social worker provides services.

(6) Identification and Verification: Social workers who use electronic means to provide services shall represent themselves to the public with accuracy and make efforts to verify client identity and contact information.

(7) Privacy, Confidentiality, Documentation, and Security: Social workers shall protect client privacy when using technology in their practice and document all services, taking special safeguards to protect client information in the electronic record.

(8) Risk Management: Social workers providing services through the use of the telephone or other electronic means shall ensure high-quality practices and procedures that are legally sound and ethical to protect clients and safeguard against litigation.

(9) Practice Competencies

9.1) *Advocacy and Social Action*: Social workers shall use technology to inform and mobilize communities about policies that will benefit individuals and groups and seek to provide tools, opportunities, and information so that clients are able to advocate directly for their own interests.

9.2) *Community Practice*: Social workers shall advocate for the adoption and use of relevant technologies that will enhance the well-being of communities.

9.3) *Administrative Practice*: Social workers shall keep themselves informed about technology that will advance quality program operations and service delivery, invest in and maintain such systems, and establish policies to ensure access, appropriate security, and privacy in agency information systems.

9.4) *Clinical Competencies*: Social workers shall strive to become and remain knowledgeable about the dynamics of online relationships, the advantages and drawbacks of non-face-to-face interactions, and the ways in which technology-based social work practice can be safely and appropriately conducted.

9.5) *Research:* Social workers conducting, evaluating, disseminating, or implementing research using technological approaches shall do so in a manner that ensures ethical credibility and ensures the informed consent of the participant.

9.6) *Supervision:* When using or providing supervision and consultation by technological means, social work supervisors and supervisees shall follow the standards that would be applied to a face to face supervisory relationship and shall be competent in the technologies used.

(10) Continuing Education: Social workers shall adhere to the NASW Standards for Continuing Professional Education and follow applicable licensing laws regarding continuing education delivered via electronic means.

The underlying thread that runs throughout the standards of practice is that social workers and regulatory bodies that choose to use digital and other electronic forms of technology to better serve their clients have a *moral and professional obligation* to review pertinent research and practice literature, and become familiar with rapidly emerging and changing ethical standards (Reamer, 2013). In addition, social workers and their supervisors have the responsibility to ensure that staff are "proficient in the technological skills and tools required for competent and ethical practice and for seeking appropriate training and consultation to stay current with emerging technologies" (Reamer, 2013).

3.5 Defining a Practice-Led Approach in the Field of Social Work

Practice-led approaches, as opposed to technology-led approaches, involve "starting with social work practice, not with the [technologies] themselves" (Hill & Shaw, 2011). In this sense, social workers play a key role – along with technical developers and other key stakeholders – in developing the mobile technology infrastructure design. In a practice-led environment, hardware and software should be easy to use and "not get in the way of face-to-face work" (Hill & Shaw, 2011).

Social scientist Everett Rogers developed extensive work on innovation diffusion theory, which offers insight on the diffusion of information technology in human sciences (Fitch, 2005). Rogers (1995) defines innovation as "an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption", and diffusion as "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system". Rogers identifies that innovations share the following characteristics that affect how quickly they will be diffused:

(1) Relative advantage–the degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it supersedes;

(2) Compatibility–the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters;

(3) Complexity–the degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use;

(4) Trialability–the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis;

(5) Observability–the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others (Fitch, 2005)

In the context of social work, it is essential that rather than soliciting social workers' feedback after an application has already been developed and decided upon by upper management, input should occur "at the beginning of the conceptualization process, with specific attention being given to Rogers' frameworks . . . Prototypes could then be developed, evaluated, and modified as needed" (Fitch, 2005).

4 CROSS-JURISDICTIONAL SCAN

4.1 Alberta

The Child Intervention Division (CID) in Alberta's Children's Services reported the following information:

Currently some caseworkers and supervisors have been given laptops with a virtual desktop capability so that they can access the electronic system virtually, as well as complete case notes while they are away from their desk.

These laptops provided several benefits to improving child protection practice:

- More time with clients: Allows more time spent on assessment tasks and less on administrative duties. They are able to enter their contact logs electronically from the beginning and therefore don't have to write them with a pad and pen and then re-enter them into a computer later.
- Scanning of documents: Allows caseworkers to scan and upload certain key planning documents directly into the electronic system. This enables them to complete Signs of Safety tools with children (drawings) away from the office and be able to upload into the electronic system later.

Operational efficiency is has also been increased by the addition of having two computer screens in their office which allows them to navigate and manage multiple documents easier.

CID reported several challenges with the implementation of these technologies:

- Technical difficulties: software glitches (such as the remote desktop not coming up)
- Staff not being comfortable with the technology.

These issues were resolved in the following manner:

- Staff were educated by the IT department on how to set up the equipment.
- Peers who were comfortable with the technology supported each other.

The Alberta College of Social Workers (ACSW) brought up several issues with how the Alberta government was implementing technology for social work use, stating that pilot solutions are constantly being implemented but often what they find is that technology becomes a barrier so people don't use it. Among the issues they raised were:

- Taking notes on an iPad/tablet/laptop is socially awkward and changes the dynamics of the interaction.

- The case management software is often purchased "out of the box," with little customization done to suit the specific needs of Alberta social workers. An example is that the Alberta government purchased case management software from Irish company Curam which is compatible with social work processes but applies a business model. Thus, because legislation and terminology are sometimes specific to each jurisdiction (differences between Ireland and Alberta) social workers have difficulty using the technology effectively. The feeling expressed was that technology was driving practice, instead of the other way around and was stifling the creation of innovative solutions to resolve a client's issue. Social workers who come up with a creative solution that is within legislative and regulatory guidelines are unable to action it "because the computer won't let me."

CID stated that they had completed a business case to support the use of the mobile applications. The benefit of a mobile application is that it allows the caseworker to take a "part" of the file with them into a client's home to take notes or complete assessments on a small tablet. This would save administrative time in getting contact notes into the electronic case management system, while being light and easy to carry. The other advantage is that work could be done offline on the tablet and inputted later. To date, there has not been available funding for this project.

The ACSW stated that although it has been some time since there were new technological implementations they didn't anticipate any in the near future as the feeling is that it is incompatible with social practice.

Alberta does use Teleconferencing for remote or rural clients and Alberta has purchased and runs their own internal teleconferencing system that they secure. The difficulty is when teleconferencing needs to be extended beyond the boundaries of Alberta. In these cases Skype and other commercial teleconferencing tools may be used on a case by case basis but there are concerns about this as the information is transmitted to the United States which has legal access to it under American legislation.

4.2 Saskatchewan

The Program Effectiveness Division of Child and Family Programs in the Ministry of Social Services reported the following:

Currently Saskatchewan social workers have access to cellular telephones so when they are in the field they are able to call back to the office to obtain information or to seek supervisory assistance/direction. The cellular telephones are also useful in the event they encounter a dangerous situation and need to call for assistance from a colleague or police. In 2013/14 the Ministry conducted a pilot project in which child protection staff were given IBM ThinkPad X230 tablets. These tablets were purchased based on criteria given from the Information Technology Department (ITD) and the Government of Saskatchewan such as the ability to install

the case management system (Linkin), ease of accessing the network outside of a government building and the features of the tablet. 60 employees, 20 from each of the three service areas, participated in the project and currently 47 are still assigned to regional workers.

Feedback from the pilot project indicated varied use of the tablets by social workers:

- Some reported they never took the tablet out of the office.
- Others reported they did not use the tablet in front of their clients but after leaving the client would pull over on the side of the road and enter the information on the tablet.
- Some stated that they used the tablets extensively to the access Linkin, forms, manuals, email, and enjoyed the added mobility.

The pilot projected identified several benefits to providing child protection. Those who spent a significant time in rural areas reported that when they had good connectivity they found the tablet very useful as it provided the following benefits:

- Significantly enhanced access to information including forms, manuals, email, and the case management system.
- After hour emergency duty workers greatly benefited from increased access to information previously not available during after hours.
- Allowed ability to keep up with contacts so that time in the office was spent on assessment documents.
- More timely access to information
- Allowed for work in areas they were not able to previously (such as while they were a passenger in a car travelling to a meeting).
- Allowed real-time data entry which saved time and meant they didn't have to take notes on paper and then re-enter information at the office.
- Challenges in using the tablet reported by the participants could be categorized into two types, client-dynamic and technical.

The following were reported by the participants as client-dynamic challenges:

- Clients found tablet distracting
- Use of tablet made clients uncomfortable
- Caused young clients to lose focus
- Social workers found themselves unfocused on conversation
- Created a barrier for client interaction
- Tablet was disruptive
- Impedes the effectiveness of meetings
- Safety threat if you have to leave quickly
- Children wanted to play with it
- Not useful during investigation process

The following were reported as technical challenges:

- Lost signals and loss of unsaved work
- Poor network connection in field
- Slow logging on or boot up
- Slow network
- Time consuming to take out of the office
- Cursor jumps around
- Time outs causing difficulty
- Tablet was too heavy

Management stated that they were addressing the issue of the weight of the tablets by exploring other lighter tablets as options. They reported that once some staff became more familiar with the use of the tablets they realized the benefits of their use, while others continued to not see benefits in the field. Currently ITD is upgrading the tablets to the IBM ThinkPad Yoga 260 as part of a project to see if all staff should be deployed such devices which would replace desktop computer, however moving forward on this project would require investment dollars.

4.3 Manitoba

Manitoba's Child and Family Services division (CFS) in the Department of Families has several program portfolios that use mobile technology.

- Provincial Investigators (PI) units use cell phones due to safety concerns surrounding their travel requirements and the need to work alone. PI's are also given a satellite phone, which is used when travelling to areas of the province where cell phone reception is poor.
- The Street Reach Program that works with sexually exploited youth uses cellular phones, iPads, laptops with CFSIS (an internal CFS application and Virtual Private Network (VPN)) access and encrypted radios for team communication.

Due to security and privacy concerns, the current case management system (CFSA – Child and Family Services Applications) for Child Welfare is not available for mobile phones or tablets. Some laptops have the ability to connect to the system using VPN and Wi-Fi when they are outside the office. Some use smartphones which are tethered to the laptop to access the system. Plans to upgrade or replace the system in the near future already have requirements for any new system to have robust mobile functionality.

According to CFS, their various programs cited the following benefits of mobile technology use:

- Street Reach program uses cellular phones/iPads to provide access to social media for intelligence gathering purposes to allow the team to monitor

children's possible whereabouts and peer connections to assist with locating children reported missing (i.e. live video/posted pictures on Facebook provide location services for children).

- Laptops with the CFSIS application installed allows mobile access to children's files (placement, social worker/agency, social history and recent intakes) and allows workers to look up information pertaining to other youth connected to children at risk, gather addresses and notify agencies in the event of locating children who are being victimized through exploitation that we have identified in the field.
- The radios provided increased communication while in the field and thus allow for more real-time status updates. Furthermore, the radios allow for increased safety through the use of routine team 'check-in's.'
- Real-time entry into the case management system allowed front line social workers to spend their time more efficiently instead of writing notes on a pad and then entering information into the case management system at the office.

CFS programs reported overall operational efficiency gains in the completion of assessment, case notes, and on-site agreements through the use of mobile technology but felt the more important improvements were connected to the safety of their Street Reach program. The tools allowed the team to access information and stay in communication in real-time and allowed front line/field workers to access information quickly (via mobile CFSIS) to locate at risk children/youth to intervene immediately and maintain their safety.

Reported implementation challenges included the following:

- Due to security and privacy concerns the Street Reach program's need for encrypted radios and mobile computer access through the CFSIS application required pilot testing in the field and thus multiple levels of approval were required.
- Internet connectivity remains a consistent challenge especially in their northern and other remote communities.
- It is not always practical for workers to carry their laptops with them and have access to the Internet at the client's home.

These challenges were addressed as follows:

- Manitoba is currently exploring a new IT application for its system, allowing mobile solutions (e.g. tablets), which are more portable for all front line social workers.
- Thorough training of front line social workers on the use of mobile devices has been identified as a critical process in the new model.

Connectivity and access with the new model of mobile functionality is still anticipated to being a problem.

4.4 Ontario

The Child Welfare Secretariat in the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) reported that Ontario's child protection services are delivered exclusively by children's aid societies and Indigenous child well-being societies, which are independent entities. The ministry does not prescribe the resources required by societies to perform their functions. Each society is responsible for its own determination of resource allocation, including the technology required by staff, to support children and families.

The ministry is implementing a single information system, the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) – a Curam based integrated case management system for all societies in Ontario. The information required to make the best decisions for each child receiving services will be accessible in one place and information will be able to be shared electronically between societies. CPIN will provide capability to society workers to enter electronic case notes. These case notes will become part of the case record in CPIN and will be searchable. Society staff are trained on the use of the system prior to implementation, and societies are responsible for determining what technology, if any, staff will be provided to access and complete case notes in the field.

An interview with a member of Social Assistance Services Modernization Branch in the Social Assistance Operations Division in the Ontario Governments Ministry of Community and Social Services provided the following report:

Problems with current standard of mobile technology usage:

- Current implementation of technology in the field of social work is long overdue and current practice is out of date.
- Current systems are inefficient and social workers are being misused as they are forced to perform administration duties when they should be focused on their social work duties.
- Current systems are not in sync with public perception of mobile technology as a routine expectation of modern institutions and this is resulting in negative client experiences.

Implementation of new case management system:

- Will be introduced in November of 2017
- Clients will manage their own case through a web responsive mobile app that is compatible with several other Ontario government services. A holistic solution.
- The web-responsive program is website based and thus it works just as well on laptops as it does on mobile devices with identical screens and interface options.

- Clients will be able to use the app to report income, communicate with case workers, send pictures, look at incoming payments and benefit eligibilities.
- The system is streamlined for both the client and third party service providers, allowing any third party service providers such as doctors, dentists, etc. to confirm digitally that clients are on social assistance.
- They are currently in the prototype stage with 300-500 people in total participating in the pilot project. Eventually the pilot project will include an estimated 5000 – 6000 people.

Several concerns were identified with the implementation of the project including issues relating to social worker concerns, privacy concerns and infrastructure concerns. The concerns relating to social workers and how they were resolved are as follows:

- To ensure both social workers and clients would recognize the benefits of the new program social workers and clients were considered important stakeholders and were involved in the design process.
- A blended team of developers were used with some development tools being bought to assist in the creation of the program but most was done as an internal build process to ensure program met all client and social workers suggestions.
- In order to ensure social workers did not feel threatened by the new technology it was emphasized that the goal of the new program was a work reduction movement and not a social worker replacement movement. Explanations were given to social workers that the goal of the project was to allow them to focus on the "right things" such as servicing their clients and not to take away their jobs.
- Emphasis was given to how the program would reduce the social workers work load and increase time with clients
- In order to meet security concerns the web responsive program is internet based which allows the information to be kept on Ontario servers to ensure no security/privacy gaps by using software that is stored on American servers and subject to American security laws (i.e. Patriot Act).
- Security software called "On*e*-key" (citation needed) is used to secure users information. In addition they are in the process of piloting the use of another program "secure key" (citation needed) and the combination of these two programs provides seamless security for users.
- Because the system is dependent on clients having internet access the Ontario government is looking to partner with the Federal government and Private/Public Partnerships to provide low cost Internet and mobile services to low income rural areas.

- Private/Public Partnerships are seen as having the potential to access the current untapped markets of rural areas with the understanding that Internet access is quickly becoming a necessity of life.

4.5 Quebec

No information was gathered on Quebec due to language and time restrictions.

4.6 New Brunswick

We did not receive a response to our IPSR or emails sent to various levels of government and regulatory bodies.

4.7 Prince Edward Island

PEI's Policy Development division of the Ministry of Child and Family Services (MCFS) responded to the IPSR with the following information:

- Recently laptops were provisioned for all permanent positions (front line staff and supervisors but not administration staff). Along with this, each worker has access to a VPN that provides remote access to the file system and each workers' individual computer files (i.e. word perfect, email). Each office also has a few turbo sticks that allow workers to access the in areas where Wi-Fi isn't accessible; however, most workers use their laptops at home, so Wi-Fi isn't an issue.
- In addition to this, each social worker and support staff (except administration staff) have cell phones, and all of the supervisors have Blackberry phones. However these phones are not smart phones and quite old.
- A "talk to text" program is currently being piloted but its future status is currently unclear.
- Office desks have desktop monitors and keyboards attached through a docking system which allows laptop users to plug in their laptop and set up their desk space in an ergonomic position.

According to MCFS, benefits of their implementation of mobile technology are as follows:

- There have been significant improvements with respect to after hour's coverage. The access to information improved, which resulted in better responses and more timely interventions when needed. After Hours Emergency Duty workers in the province now use their laptops and VPNs to access and document information. Previously, the workers would get paged and respond by phone; if they needed more information, they would have to drive to the office and access the computer system. Depending on where the worker lived, this could add a significant amount of time to the call. It has

also been effective in allowing workers to access information at outside meetings/case conferences as needed.

- The laptops have been quite helpful in allowing workers to complete some documentation/court work at home in the evenings, allowing for a bit more flexibility when overtime is required. The laptops have improved work/life balance as they've been helpful in allowing staff to work from home if they have a sick child, or to work around personal appointments.
- During actual work hours, the laptops have also been effective for staff in the more rural areas or staff who do supervised visits to complete documentation on down time between appointments rather than returning to the office, which saves time and mileage costs.
- Cell phones for staff and blackberries for supervisors have been crucial for maintaining contact for safety reasons or for sharing information. Blackberries allow for supervisors to access child protection reports and emails at all times, which means they do not always need to be replaced when they have out of office meetings.

MCFS reported having the following challenges:

- When the laptops were implemented, it was assumed they would help in having documentation completed contemporaneously. It was thought that staff would take the laptops with them when they were doing out of office work, and then be able to complete notes/assessments as soon as they were done their meetings. Given the nature of child protection work, this didn't really seem to happen. In other social work professions, the scheduling of client meetings are stable and predictable. Child protection doesn't have the same level of predictability, and what seems like a simple task can turn into a day-long event. It's not unusual for someone to go from meeting to meeting all day without time to take any meal breaks or pull over to the side of the road to complete notes.
- The implementation of the laptops encountered some technical problems where access to drives or connecting to printers was an issue.
- Some workers who struggle more with technology have challenges in using the VPN to access client file system.
- The cell phones that front line staff have are quite old and are not smart phones. Over time, this has created additional difficulty due to the increases in client's texting for service. Many clients have text only service plans through their cellular phone provider, and staff cell phones are old models which require a lot of time and effort to text back. It has also increased concerns that too much casework is being done via text.\

- In some rural areas, the cell phone service can be poor which impacts the use of turbo sticks because they require the cell phone signal to work.
- Keeping the cell phones charged can also be an issue.

These challenges were addressed by MCFS as follows:

- Following the implementation of laptops, IT support resources were assigned to the project, so they were accessible and aware of the issues users had.
- Occasionally routine computer issues occur but these are generally fixed by IT in a reasonable amount of time.
- Education on how to use the laptops and access the VPN were generally successful in helping users who were not comfortable with the technology.
- New policy addressing the problem of too much casework being done via text messaging is currently being researched.

The provision of cell phone car chargers was implemented to reduce issues of phones running out of power due to lack of time to charge phones.

4.8 Nova Scotia

The Nova Scotia Intergovernmental Relations Division of the Department of Community Services responded that due to a lack of resources they were unable to answer our survey questions.

4.9 Newfoundland and Labrador

The Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development responded to our IPSR with the following information:

1) What Specific type(s) of mobile technology systems or tools do your child protection workers use to allow for work mobility/working outside the traditional office?

"Team Shared Cell Phones"

2) What impacts have these tools had on improving child protection practice?

"Allows for the social workers who share these phones to communicate and make contact from the field as necessary."

3) How do these tools impact operational efficiency?

"Effective time management."

4) What challenges (if any) were encountered during the implementation of these tools?

n/a

5) How were these challenges addressed and to what degree were they effective?

n/a

4.10 Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut

We did not receive a response to our IPSR or emails sent to various levels of government and regulatory bodies from any of the northern territories.

4.11 Washington State

The following information was provided by a member of the Washington State chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).

- Implementation of mobile technology has its challenges but overall "It's great."
- NASW in particular has produced guidelines on its use and has solicited the help of noted scholar Frederic Reamer who is leading academic researcher on this topic.
- During her experience working for the Veterans Association (VA), they were very concerned about work being done securely for issues of national security. During her time they moved from field notes being taken through pad and pen and then dictated to phone operator who would enter the information into a case management system to taking notes and then entering information directly into system at office to the current use of secured, encrypted laptops that connect remotely to the case management system.
- She could only speak to her time at the VA and cannot speak to practice for all agencies but at the VA, they were many rules that govern the use of laptops and their use was restricted. Each laptop was assigned to an individual case worker and it was to be on their person at all times and not be left alone.
- Because the VA services a large and diverse group of individuals they have a large case management system. She says that the implementation of this laptop system goes back at least 10 years and she feels it has been successful. It allows one to enter information faster and in a timely manner which is especially important for crisis interventions.
- She feels this has led to increased efficiency as the previous procedures were more labour intensive. It allows for the worker to enter a note and add on a health provider, who could be back at the medical centre, so they can access

the information. In cases when the social worker is bringing in the client to the health care provider this enables better and faster communication.

4.12 Australia

The Strategic Policy and Intergovernmental Relations, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, Queensland Government responded to our survey request with the following:

- A number of different Queensland Government departments employ social workers in different roles; e.g. Local Area Coordinators, clinicians etc. Many Queensland Government social and human services are delivered by contracted non-government service providers. The use of IM and IT tools by social workers varies from department to department. There is no established mechanism for distribution of a survey form to relevant management personnel for completion of your survey.
- The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (DCCSDS) requires Director-General approval for research involving the department's staff, clients and/or their parents.
- We suggest you seek advice from the Australian Association of Social Workers, Queensland on how best to contact appropriate respondents for your survey.
- Our attempts to contact the AASW were not responded to.

5. DISCUSSION

Our findings highlight that there is a large variety in the various jurisdictions in the way in which they implement and use mobile technology in the field of social work. The various types of mobile technologies found, as part of our cross-jurisdictional scan revealed that government-provided cellphones was ubiquitous across provinces; however, the ways in which social workers accessed their respective case management system(s) was less consistent. More specifically, a significant proportion of provinces in Canada – in addition to Washington State – use laptops, with access to VPNs. A small number of provinces are either currently using tablets, or are in the process of researching tablet-use in the field. Ontario represents an entirely different approach to mobile technology use in the field, as they are focusing their efforts on client-based technology use – as opposed to all other provinces that use practitioner-based technology tools.

It appears that provinces that use higher levels of technology, reap the most benefits, or are more likely to see efficiency, productivity, and mobility gains – in addition to other enhanced capabilities. As an example, provinces such as Newfoundland and Labrador – whose only technology is cellphone usage – do not report the efficiency gains that are reported by provinces that use higher levels of technology, such as Alberta, Saskatchewan, PEI, etc. Furthermore, as seen in the example of Manitoba's Street Reach Program, mobile technology enables social

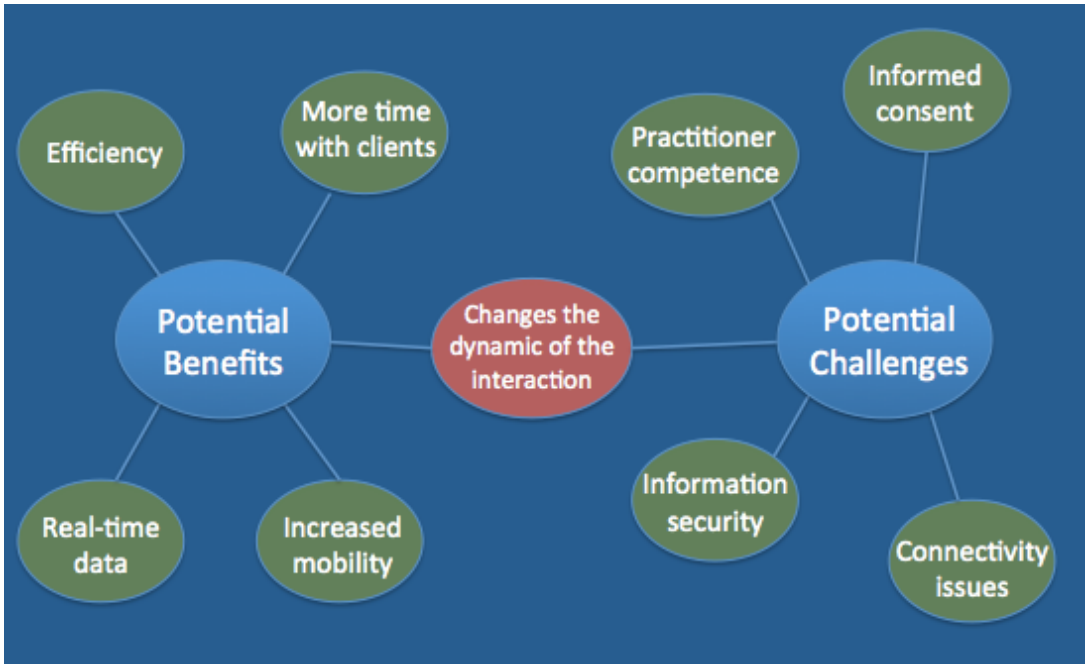
workers to have greater real-time information-gathering and communication with youth, in regards to locating missing children. Cellphones appear to be a vital communication and safety resource for both caseworkers and clients. Most jurisdictions reported that technology resources greatly enhanced their after-hours access to their case management system. Some provinces highlighted that social workers had better work-life balance after the integration of technology, such as being able to work from home, greater flexibility in scheduled work, and less time spent on paperwork.

The challenges identified through our research include a challenge overcoming social workers' objections or reluctance to integrating new technology systems or tools in the field. The implementation of technology faces the most challenges in rural and low-income areas, where Internet connectivity and access is limited or unreliable. The cost of improving technological infrastructure looks to be an ongoing challenge for most provinces. Although information privacy and security challenges currently have technological solutions (passwords, encryption, etc.), special care must still be taken to ensure ethical use of technology is continuously maintained in the field.

It is our opinion that Ontario is a leader in Canada in implementing technology in the field, as they are taking a practice-led approach, while engaging their social workers and clients in the design and evaluation of their technology platforms and tools. The approach that they are using seems to eliminate social worker objections that are encountered in other provinces, where technology imposed on the social workers without input. Although Alberta used the same software company (Curam) as Ontario, they use an "out-of-the-box" version, without consulting with their practitioners. Alberta experienced data entry issues when using their case management system, and ultimately discovered that the software did not fit their social workers' everyday needs. In stark contrast, Ontario is in the process of taking a ground-up approach in the design, consulting with their social workers and clients as they develop the software, so that similar issues can be avoided. This approach both produces a better product for the clients, and eliminates objections among social workers in bringing the technologies into the field. In addition, Ontario has recognized that the ability to access government information and documents online is quickly becoming an expectation, and therefore governments who fail to adopt robust mobile technology are increasingly likely to face public criticism or dissatisfaction. In taking this forward-thinking approach, they are engaging with the Federal government and private industries to plan infrastructure developments to combat this obstacle, which also opens up new revenue streams.

A prominent and interesting finding that we uncovered – both through our literature review and cross-jurisdictional scan – is that mobile technology appears to change the dynamic of the interaction between social workers and their clients; however, the *nature* of that change is not consistent and requires further research.

We have summarized the potential benefits and challenges that social workers may experience when using technology in the field, in the below figure:



6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above discussion, we believe the best course of action for BC is to follow the Ontario model, which includes a ground-up and practice-lead approach to the design and development of new technologies, which includes both social workers and clients in the processes. Furthermore, MCFD should be recommending to the appropriate ministries to explore the possibility of engaging with the Federal government and build public-private partnerships in order to increase access to Internet in low-income rural areas.

However we recognize that the cost in undertaking such a project at this time may be prohibitive; in such an instance, we have seven major recommendations to offer to MCFD, when considering integrating formally vetted mobile technology in the field of social work:

(1) We recommend following the Manitoba and Saskatchewan models of introducing tablets to social workers. The specific model of tablet must be able to provide Wi-Fi, access to a VPN, as well as have access to the case management system provisioned by MCFD.
(2) MCFD should anticipate challenges similar to that detailed by Saskatchewan and look to find tablets that are light-weight.
(3) Commit sufficient IT resources to provide educational training and support to social workers using tablets.

(4) A thematic qualitative study is needed to uncover the specific challenges that social workers are having with the technologies, to uncover the underlying barriers, and better understand how to meet the needs of social workers and their clients.
(5) Take a collaborative, practice-led approach to integrating mobile technology in the field of social work. By involving social workers in the design, development and evaluation of mobile technology tools and software, there is a much higher chance of successful uptake.
(6) Conduct formal evaluations that measure (and quantify) the efficiency and productivity gains of technology-use in the field.
(7) Share the findings of your evaluations generously, so that provinces across Canada can learn from each other's successes and failures.

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8. APPENDIX ITEMS

8.1 Acknowledgements

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collegial and supportive environment. Finally, we must thank the various respondents who provided their time to answer our questions.

8.2 Interview Probing Questions

1. What are your thoughts on implementing technology in the field of social work?
2. Do you have examples of this things going on in your province right now? How is that working?
3. What specific type(s) of mobile technology systems or tools do your social workers use to allow for work mobility/working outside the traditional office? (for example, do your social workers fill out forms on a tablet or laptop, or do they utilize other technologies such as electronic pens?)
4. What is being done to ensure that these technology systems, allowing for work mobility and productivity, are safe and secure?
5. Have new technology systems and/or tools been recently implemented within your association?
    - If *yes*: What sort of changes have you seen since then? Would you consider the implementation successful or a failure? (Please explain)
    - If *no*: Would your association be interested in implementing new technology tools? Why or why not?
6. Have you done a formal evaluation? If so, could you share the results with us?
7. Is there any relevant information or materials that you could send me that could benefit our research project?

8.3 Interprovincial Scan Request Questions

1. What Specific type(s) of mobile technology systems or tools do your child protection workers use to allow for work mobility/working outside the traditional office?
2. What impacts have these tools had on improving child protection practice?
3. How do these tools impact operational efficiency?
4. What challenges (if any) were encountered during the implementation of these tools?
5. How were these challenges addressed and to what degree were they effective?
6. Is there anyone in your jurisdiction that would be available to answer any additional questions relating to this scan? Could you please provide their contact information?

8.4 Cross-Jurisdictional Scan Items

Alberta: Our cross-jurisdictional scan for Alberta includes two data sources, a member of the Alberta College of Social Workers (ACSW) who was interviewed over

the phone and another from the Alberta governments Child Intervention Division who responded to our Interprovincial Scan Request (IPR).

Alberta College of Social Workers (ACSW): The phone interview was done using the survey questions (see appendix 1) as an interview guide. The interviewee asked the questions from the guide by either quoting the question verbatim or paraphrasing it. Not all of the questions were asked directly as during the course of the interview the answers were volunteered in response to one of the other questions. Once the interviewee was satisfied that all of the survey questions had been answered the interview was concluded.

Summary of interview:
Currently Alberta Social Workers typically take notes using a pad and pen and then come back to the office to enter it into the case management system. Some may have a tablet in their car. In her experience the topic is often discussed about what could and could not be brought in. The Alberta government has brought in various pilot solutions but often what they find is that technology becomes a barrier so people don't use it. Taking notes on an iPad is socially awkward and changes the dynamics of the interaction. Another issue is that large organizations often purchase and use case management software "out of the box" which has not specifically been designed for the needs of local social workers. An example is that Alberta purchased case management software from Irish company Curam which is compatible with social work processes but applies a business model. Also, because legislation and terminology are sometimes specific to each jurisdiction (differences between Ireland/Scotland and Alberta) social workers have difficulty using the technology effectively. The feeling is that technology drives the practice, social workers who maybe come up with a creative solution that is within legislative guidelines are unable to action it "because the computer won't let me."

Alberta does use Teleconferencing for remote or rural clients and Alberta has purchased and runs their own internal teleconferencing system that they secure. The difficulty is when teleconferencing needs to be extended beyond the boundaries of Alberta. In these cases Skype and other commercial teleconferencing tools may be used on a case by case basis but there are concerns about this as the information is transmitted to the United States which has legal access to it under American Legislation. There have been no recent technological implementations in Alberta and the feeling is that it is incompatible with social work practice and doesn't anticipate any new technological mobility projects being implemented in the near future.

Alberta Provincial Government, Child Intervention Division, Alberta's Children's Services:

In response to our IPR we received the following answers to our questions:

1) What Specific type(s) of mobile technology systems or tools do your child protection workers use to allow for work mobility/working outside the traditional office?

   Alberta has completed a business case to support the use of the mobile applications. The benefit of a mobile application is that it allows the caseworker to take a "part" of the file with them into a client's home to take notes or complete assessments on a small tablet. This would save administrative time in getting contact notes into the electronic case management system, while being light and easy to carry. The other advantage is that work could be done offline on the tablet and inputted later. To date, there has not been available funding for this project.

   In the meantime, some caseworkers and supervisors have been given laptops with a virtual desktop capability so that they can access the electronic system virtually, as well as complete case notes while they are away from their desk. In addition to this, Alberta allows caseworkers to scan and upload certain key planning documents directly into the electronic system. This enables them to complete Signs of Safety tools with children (drawings) away from the office and be able to upload into the electronic system later.

2) What impacts have these tools had on improving child protection practice?

   The use of laptops have allowed staff to spend more time on assessment tasks as they have less time being spent on administrative duties. For example, as they are able to do their contact logs electronically from the beginning, they do not have to write them on paper and then retype them. As well, more information is available electronically and therefore available to after-hours workers. This allows for better decision making as the information is available in real-time on the electronic system.

3) How do these tools impact operational efficiency?

   In addition to less time completing contact notes and having access to the electronic system away from the office, they now have two screens when they are in the office working. This allows them to navigate and manage multiple documents and screens which makes it easier to do work.

4) What challenges (if any) were encountered during the implementation of these tools?

Sometimes the technology has glitches (i.e.: remote desk not coming up). Some staff were initially a little hesitant to use laptops as they were not comfortable with the technology.

5) How were these challenges addressed and to what degree were they effective?

   Staff were supported by IT as they showed them how to set up the equipment. Peers who were in the office and comfortable with the technology supported each other.

6) Is there anyone in your jurisdiction that would be available to answer any additional questions relating to this scan? Could you please provide their contact information?

Saskatchewan:

Our cross-jurisdictional scan for Saskatchewan includes two data sources, a member of the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers (SASW) who provided a written response to our survey questions and another from the Saskatchewan governments Program Effectiveness Division of Child and Family Programs in the Ministry of Social Services who responded to our Interprovincial Scan Request (IPR).

Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers (SASW):

This response was done as a result of a 'cold email' requesting their response to our survey. The respondent stated they would only respond from their perspective as a regulatory body and so some of the questions related to their own organizations use of technology for mobility and not that of what Saskatchewan government social workers were using.

1. What are your thoughts on implementing technology in the field of social work?

   As a regulatory body, we recognize the benefits of technology in our work. We are, however, mindful of the risks of using technology and how they might impact our Code of Ethics and Standards of practice – i.e. in terms of confidentiality, boundaries, integrity of the progression.

2. Do you have examples of this things going on in your province right now? How is that working?

   I think that the majority of social workers today use cell phones, scan documents, send assessments by E Mail, and so on. Scheduling is often done electronically, files stored electronically, access to work E Mail on cell phone.

3. What specific type(s) of mobile technology systems or tools do your social workers use to allow for work mobility/working outside the traditional office? (for example, do your social workers fill out forms on a tablet or laptop, or do they utilize other technologies such as electronic pens?)

   I can't answer this, as it would be specific to workplaces.

4. What is being done to ensure that these technology systems, allowing for work mobility and productivity, are safe and secure?

   That would be an individual employer responsibility; however for registered social workers there is the requirement to be familiar with and follow our standards of practice.

5. Have new technology systems and/or tools been recently implemented within your association?

   For the Saskatchewan Association of Social workers, we moved from a paper based registration/renewal system to an online system about 3 years ago. With this, credit card payment is the only option for paying membership dues. Members can go into their own profile and update information.

   - If *yes*: What sort of changes have you seen since then? Would you consider the implementation successful or a failure? (Please explain)
     It would now be a success, but the first year was painful, working out the bugs in a new system and a change of process for our members. Our membership is very diverse – students to retired. In addition, one of our member committees has taken on maintaining a Facebook page for all our members, and individual branches have their own Facebook page. Facetime has been used to link in members to meetings and telehealth has been used for branch meetings, to enable more rural members to participate.

6. Have you done a formal evaluation? If so, could you share the results with us?
   If *no*: Would your association be interested in implementing new technology tools? Why or why not?
   We are beginning to talk about this – it does require resources to maintain and we are limited in staff. As an organization we realize that we must use technology in order to keep up with our members and engage them in the way that they are most comfortable, and with younger social workers it is the world of twitter, Facebook, texting, etc.

6. Is there any relevant information or materials that you could send me that could benefit our research project?

I don't think we have anything at this time.

Saskatchewan Governments Program Effectiveness Division of Child and Family Programs in the Ministry of Social Services:

1. What specific type(s) of mobile technology systems or tools do your child protection workers use to allow for work mobility/working outside the traditional office?
   - In SK, our staff have access to cellular telephones so when they are in the field they are able to call back to the office to obtain information or to seek supervisory assistance/direction. The cellular telephones are also useful in the event they encounter a dangerous situation and need to call for assistance from a colleague or police.
   - In 2013-14, the Ministry piloted mobile devices for child protection staff (IBM ThinkPad X230 Tablet). Considerations were given to technology supported by Information Technology Department (ITD) and the Government of Saskatchewan; features of the tablet, ability to install the Linkin (case management system) application on the device, and ease of accessing the network outside of a government building. 60 employees participated in the pilot, 20 from each of the three Service Areas. Presently, only 47 are still assigned to regional workers. ITD is upgrading the tablets to this product: IBM ThinkPad Yoga 260. The staff were deployed mobile devices/tablets to determine the efficacy of such devices and to determine if all staff should be deployed such devices. Tablets would replace desktop computers. Moving forward would require investment dollars.

   A portion of staff identified they never took the tablet out of the office. Some staff indicated that they did not use the tablet in front of clients but pulled over onto the side of the road to enter information into the tablet. Others indicated that in the field, they used the tablet to access forms, manuals, email, Linkin (case management system), input information, work from home, and did find it very useful when they were out of town and needed to find information. The staff that used the tablet with clients, used it to enter contacts, annual reports and to access Linkin.

2. What impacts have these tools had on improving child protection practice?
   - Those that conduct significant rural work enjoyed the tablet when they had good connectivity. As mentioned above it significantly enhanced access to information including forms, manuals, email, and the case management system. The after hours emergency duty workers also significantly benefited with greater access to information after hours.

3. How do these tools impact operational efficiency?

- In theory, the tablets were supposed to support staff to enter contact logs into the case management system in a timely manner. However, we do still see delays in entering contact logs.
- The most recent positive account is that the long-term ward worker uses the tablet and is able to keep up with contacts so that time in the office is spent on assessment documents.
- Access to information is timelier.
- People are able to work in places that they otherwise could not i.e. as a passenger in a car travelling to a meeting.
- Staff save time as they can enter work in real time and not have to complete work or takes notes on paper and then enter them back in the office.

4. What challenges (if any) were encountered during the implementation of these tools?

- Challenges focused on being able to access cellular coverage and internet access especially in rural or remote areas.
- Some found challenges using the tablets with clients including:
    - Distracting
    - Some clients did not like tablet use
    - Caused young clients to lose focus
    - Worker was not focused on conversation
    - Took away from client interaction
    - Disruptive
    - Impedes effectiveness of meeting
    - Safety threat if you have to leave quickly
    - Children wanted to play with it
    - Not useful during investigation process.
- Some found technical challenges using the tablets including:
    - Lost signals and work
    - Poor network connection in field
    - Slow logging on/booting up
    - Network is slow
    - Time consuming to take out of office
    - Cursor jumps around
    - Times out.
- Other complaints focused on the weight of the tablet.

5. How were these challenges addressed and to what degree were they effective?
    - Exploration of other tablets that are lighter should decrease the issue surrounding the weight of the tablet.

- As staff became more familiar with the tablets many realized the benefits while others continued not to see the benefits in the field.

6. Is there anyone in your jurisdiction that would be available to answer any additional questions relating to this Scan? Could you please provide their contact information?

Manitoba:
We received a response to our IPR from the Child and Family Services Division in the Manitoba governments Department of Families.

1) What Specific type(s) of mobile technology systems or tools do your child protection workers use to allow for work mobility/working outside the traditional office?

   There are several program portfolios within Manitoba's CFS system that would use mobile technology. Provincial Investigators (PI) unit uses cell phones and this is mostly for the purposes of worker safety due to the travel requirements of the position and the need to work alone. The PI's do have a satellite phone which is used when traveling to areas of the province where cell phone reception is not great.

   Due to security and privacy concerns, our current system (CFSA - Child and Family Services Applications) for Child Welfare case management is not available using a mobile phone or a tablet. We have some laptop users that have the ability to connect to the system using VPN and WiFi when they are outside their usual place of work. Some users may use a smart phone (instead of WiFi), tethered to the laptop, to access the system. When we upgrade or replace our system in the near future, one of the requirements the new system is to have robust mobile functionality.

   The Street Reach program that works with Sexual Exploited youth uses; cellular phones, iPad, mobile computer with CFSIS (CFS application and VPN)access and radio's (encrypted - team communication).

2) What impacts have these tools had on improving child protection practice?

   From a Street Reach program perspective;
   -Cellular phones/iPads provide access to social media for intelligence gathering purposes to allow the team to monitor children's possible whereabouts and peer connections to assist with locating when reported missing (e.g. live video / posted pictures on Facebook provide location services for children).

-Mobile computer with CFSIS application allows mobile access to children's files (placement, social worker/Agency, social history and recent intakes) and allows workers to look up information pertaining to other youth connected to children at risk, gather addresses and notify Agencies in the event of locating children who are being victimized through exploitation that we have identified in the field.

-The radio's – team communication while in the field / SAFETY – team check-in's, status updates.

Additionally using mobile devices for case management means that the front line social workers can type their case notes instead of writing them on a pad and then typing them into the system when they are back at the office.

3) How do these tools impact operational efficiency?

These tools allow the StreetReach team access to information and stay in communication in real time and equally important to maintain safety within the unit. Front line/field work requires access to information quickly (via mobile cfsis) to locate at risk children/youth to intervene immediately and maintain their safety.

Additionally if able there is an ability to complete assessments / case notes / agreements on site will increase overall efficiency.

4) What challenges (if any) were encountered during the implementation of these tools?

Within in the Street Reach program radio's required encryption due to privacy concerns, accessing mobile computer with CFSIS IT application required pilot testing in the field which required multiple levels of approval were required.

It is noted that it is not always practical for a worker to carry their laptop with them and to have access to the internet at a client's home. Manitoba is currently exploring a new IT application for its system, allowing mobile solutions (e.g. tablets) which are more portable for all front line social workers.

Additionally INTERNET Connectivity has always been a challenge in Manitoba especially in our northern and other remote communities.

5) How were these challenges addressed and to what degree were they effective?

   Even with our future model of mobile functionality, connectivity and access is anticipated to continue to be an issue in our system.

   Critical to the process will also be relevant and thorough training to the front line social workers on the use of mobile devices.

6) Is there anyone in your jurisdiction that would be available to answer any additional questions relating to this scan? Could you please provide their contact information?

Ontario:

We received information from two different Ontario government departments. As a result of our IPR we received a response from the Child Welfare Secretariat in the Ontario governments Ministry of Children and Youth Services. This response provided a brief synopsis of Ontario's current practice and their plans to introduce a new case management system. As a result of our 'cold email' search we were put in contact with a member of the Social Assistance Services Modernization Branch in the Social Assistance Operations Division in the Ontario Governments Ministry of Community and Social Services. This contact was able to provide more details regarding the implementation of this new system.

Child Welfare Secretariat (CWS) in the Ontario governments Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS):

Instead of answering each question individually the CWS provided the following response:

In Ontario, child protection services are delivered exclusively by children's aid societies and Indigenous child well-being societies (societies), which are independent entities. The ministry does not prescribe the resources required by societies to perform their functions. Each society is responsible for its own determination of resource allocation, including the technology required by staff, to support children and families.

The ministry is implementing a single information system, the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN), a Curam based integrated case management system for all societies in Ontario. The information required to make the best decisions for

each child receiving services will be accessible in one place and information will be able to be shared electronically between societies. CPIN will provide capability to society workers to enter electronic case notes. These case notes will become part of the case record in CPIN and will be searchable. Society staff are trained on the use of the system prior to implementation, and societies are responsible for determining what technology, if any, staff will be provided to access and complete case notes in the field.

Social Assistance Services Modernization Branch in the Social Assistance Operations Division in the Ontario Governments Ministry of Community and Social Services:

1. What are your thoughts on implementing technology in the field of social work?
   - Long time coming, way behind the ball on how we use tech. how we reduce administration, too paper heavy. We rely a lot on people for the wrong things. We should be relying on them just for social work aspect, not the admin aspect. From a client experience perspective – the expectation is that we use tech. in private and (some) public sector stuff, the use of tech is prevalent and the fact that we are not using it in a big way is reducing the client experience.

2. Do you have examples of this things going on in your province right now? How is that working?
   - From a client perspective we are intro a mobile solution this winter, where clients can manage their CASE.
   - They will have a web responsive mobile app – report income, communicate with case worker, send pictures, look at next payments and what they are eligible for (requesting benefits etc.)
   - Developing it in a way so that the app is adaptable for several services including housing services
   - Prototype now. Pilot launch comes out in November
     - 300—500 people in the pilot
     - 5000-6000 people total
   - Both social workers and clients were involved in the design process
     - There hasn't been much reluctance among social workers. They are overburdened with administration at the moment and they see this as an opportunity to reduce admin.
     - They think it's a long time coming and wish it was coming sooner
     - They made a commitment that the work doing on modernization is a workload reduction movement. Trying to get them to focus on the right things – wont take jobs away from them.
     - Retention Risk-managed approach
     - Frees up time for them to sit down with clients more
   - Right now building framework to do a productivity study

- Did a productivity study before, for the general welfare. Now undertaking this in the other split. Makes it easier for evaluation later if they have a baseline to go off
- Split into 2: disability program, Ontario works (general welfare)

3. What specific type(s) of mobile technology systems or tools do your social workers use to allow for work mobility/working outside the traditional office? (for example, do your social workers fill out forms on a tablet or laptop, or do they utilize other technologies such as electronic pens?)

   Answer provided above.

4. What is being done to ensure that these technology systems, allowing for work mobility and productivity, are safe and secure?

- Security: out of the box product called one key
- Piloting "secure key"
-CRA. Tax information. They ask for banking info. Uses a third party called secure-key.
-From a user perspectives these two softwares ensure that they are adequately secure

Case workers currently do not go into the field very often. So there is no portable device. They are given a vpn.

- Their focus is not making their case workers mobile. Its more giving the clients tools for them to interact in a diff way. Doctors, dentists, etc. all need info from them to service the clients. The third party needs to verify that those clients are on social assistance digitally. Streamlined for both the third party and the client.

Rural communities:

- Low cost internet and mobile services for low income rural areas.
- Looking to partner with the federal gov for areas where there is no service at all
- Untapped market in the digital world: not consistent access. Having access to mobile and tech is a necessity.

Nova Scotia:

I received word back from the program area that due to lack of resources they are unable to respond to your request at this time. I am very sorry that we are unable to help.

Intergovernmental Relations
Nova Scotia Department of Community Services
Ministry of Community Services

Prince Edward Island:

1. What specific type(s) of mobile technology systems or tools do your child protection workers use to allow for work mobility/working outside the traditional office?

   A few years ago, we were able to obtain laptop computers for all of our permanent positions (front line staff and supervisors, not admin). Along with this, each worker has access to a VPN that provides remote access to our file system and each workers' individual computer files (i.e. word perfect, email). Each office also has access to a few turbo sticks that allow workers to access the internet so that they could possibly use their laptops/vpn's in areas where wifi wasn't accessible; however, most workers use their laptops at home, so wifi isn't an issue.

   We have made some changes to our practice where the After Hours Emergency Duty workers in the province (we have a rotating roster) are all required to use their laptops and VPNs to access and document information. Previously, we had hard copy notifications that the on call worker would take with them; this obviously wasn't the most efficient. (Our roster is mad e up of our full-time day staff--we do not have a separate team that works that shift. The workers would get paged and respond by phone; if they needed more information, they would have to drive to the office and access the computer system. Depending on where the worker lived, this could add a significant amount of time to the call. Now they can access the information wherever they are).

   In addition to this, each social worker and support staff (except admin) have cell phones, and all of the supervisors have Blackberry phones. The cell phones that front line staff have are quite old (not smart phones), and over time, this has created additional difficulty due to the increases in clients texting; however, we are hoping this will be improved upon.

   We also have a few staff piloting 'talk to text' options to allow for more support in completing documentation, but this is in the early stages. I'm not sure what direction this will go in.

   *Our laptops are connected to regular monitors and keyboards, and attached with a docking system. This ensures staff are still set up at their desk space in an ergonomic position.

2. What impacts have these tools had on improving child protection practice?

When we brought the laptops in, we had an idea that it would help in having documentation completed contemporaneously. We had the idea that staff would take the laptops with them when they were doing out of office work, and then be able to complete notes/assessments as soon as they were done their meetings. Given the nature of child protection work, this didn't really seem to happen. In other social work professions, you can schedule a one-hour appointment, and be done in an hour. Child protection doesn't have the same level of predictability, and what seems like a simple task can turn into a day-long event. It's not unusual for someone to go from meeting to meeting all day long without time to eat, let alone pull to the side of the road to complete notes.

There have been significant improvements with respect to our after hours coverage. The access to information has improved, which is resulting in better responses and more timely interventions when needed. It has also been effective in allowing workers to access information at outside meetings/case conferences as needed.

3. How do these tools impact operational efficiency?

The laptops have been quite helpful in allowing workers to complete some documentation/court work at home in the evenings, allowing for a bit more flexibility when overtime is required. We have a lot of staff with young families, and the laptops have improved their ability to have a better work/life balance. They've also been helpful in allowing staff to work from home if they have a sick child, or to work around personal appointments.

During actual work hours, the laptops have also been effective for staff in the more rural areas or staff who do supervised visits/drop in visits to complete documentation on down time between appointments rather than returning to the office, which would also theoretically save time and mileage costs.

Cell phones for staff and blackberries for supervisors have been crucial. Other than the obvious safety benefits for staff on home visits or transporting clients, staff having cell phones means that we can often get information from staff when we need it, or have staff return to the office in case of emergency. Blackberries allow for supervisors to access child protection reports and emails at all times, which means they do not always need to be replaced when they have out of office meetings.

It's hard to really effectively measure the usefulness of these tools because our caseloads and case complexity, as well as staffing numbers, vary so frequently. That being said, I certainly use my own laptop outside of the

office on a regular basis, and I know many other people to do as well, so I would see them as quite beneficial.

4. What challenges (if any) were encountered during the implementation of these tools?

   We had some IT issues with the implementation of the laptops where access to drives or connecting to printers was an issue. When we implemented the laptops, we had designated IT support that were assigned to the project, so they were very accessible and aware of the issues. Occasionally we continue to have issues which you would have with any computer, but these are generally fixed by IT in a reasonable amount of time. Some workers who struggle more with technology have more challenges in using the VPN to access our client file system--this is more of a learning curve and can usually be dealt with through a bit of education.

   Another challenge has been having workers take their work home with them too frequently. Some workers struggle with keeping a balance, so it has been a supervisor challenge to ensure these staff aren't taking their laptops home every night to continue working.

   Implementing the cell phones wasn't much of a struggle when they were initially provided (possibly 2006 or 2007, I can't quite remember), but in the last few years, texting has become an issue. We have many clients who only have text options, and our staff cell phones are the old versions that require a lot of time and effort to text back. It has also increased concerns that too much casework is being done via text, so we are working on policy development in this area.

   In some rural areas, the cell phone service can be a bit of an issue. This also impacts the use of the turbo stick because they require the cell phone signal to work. Keeping the cell phones charged can also be an issue.

5. How were these challenges addressed and to what degree were they effective?

   Most of the issues have been addressed by IT services, and I don't hear many concerns or complaints about the laptops or VPNS anymore.

   In terms of the cell phones, we have pagers that are used for the on call worker during after hour's emergencies--this ensures that the worker doesn't miss a child protection emergency. However, there is little that can be done for the cell phone service issues in the province. (We did switch

service providers a few years ago, which did improve things a bit). There were also car chargers provided to each team so that if someone had day long appointments with no access to a charger, they could take that with them.

6. Is there anyone in your jurisdiction that would be available to answer any additional questions relating to this Scan? Could you please provide their contact information?

Newfoundland and Labrador:

6) What Specific type(s) of mobile technology systems or tools do your child protection workers use to allow for work mobility/working outside the traditional office?

"Team Shared Cell Phones"

7) What impacts have these tools had on improving child protection practice?

"Allows for the social workers who share these phones to communicate and make contact from the field as necessary."

8) How do these tools impact operational efficiency?

"Effective time management."

9) What challenges (if any) were encountered during the implementation of these tools?

n/a

10) How were these challenges addressed and to what degree were they effective?

n/a

11) Is there anyone in your jurisdiction that would be available to answer any additional questions relating to this scan? Could you please provide their contact information?

Washington State:

Washington State chapter of NASW
Implementation of mobile technology has it's challenges but overall "It's great." NASW in particular has produced guidelines on it's use and has solicited the help of noted scholar F.Reamer who is leading academic researcher on this topic. During

her experience working for the Veterans Association, they were very concerned about work being done securely for issues of national security. During her time they moved from field notes being taken through pad and pen and then dictated to phone operator who would enter the information into a case management system to taking notes and then entering information directly into system at office to the current use of secured, encrypted laptops that connect remotely to the case management system. She could only speak to her time at the VA and cannot speak to practice for all agencies but at the VA, they were many rules that govern the use of laptops and their use was restricted. Each laptop was assigned to an individual case worker and it was to be on their person at all times and not be left alone. Because the VA services a large and diverse group of individuals they have a large case management system. She says that the implementation of this laptop system goes back at least 10 years and she feels it has been successful. It allows one to enter information faster and in a timely manner which is especially important for crisis interventions. It allows for the worker to enter a note and add on a health provider, who could be back at the medical centre, so they can access the information. In cases when the social worker is bringing in the client to the health care provider this enables better and faster communication. She feels this has led to increased efficiency as the previous procedures were more labour intensive but doesn't have any studies or stats to provide me but will work on it.

Australia:
Strategic Policy and Intergovernmental Relations, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, Queensland Government:
Thank you for your enquiry regarding best practices in relation to IM and IT tools to improve work mobility and productivity for social workers supporting children and families, as demonstrated by the survey questions.

A number of different Queensland Government departments employ social workers in different roles; e.g. Local Area Coordinators, clinicians etc. Many Queensland Government social and human services are delivered by contracted non-government service providers. The use of IM and IT tools by social workers varies from department to department. There is no established mechanism for distribution of a survey form to relevant management personnel for completion of your survey.

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (DCCSDS) requires Director-General approval for research involving the department's staff, clients and/or their parents. Information about the department's research application and approval process is available at the following link:
https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/gateway/about-us/research

May we suggest you seek advice from the Australian Association of Social Workers, Queensland (aaswqld@aasw.asn.au) on how best to contact appropriate respondents for your survey?

Please let me know if you have any queries in relation to the DCCSDS research application and approval process.