

Scaling-up eConsult in Quebec: what are the main policy issues?

Mélanie Ann Smithman¹, Catherine Lamoureux-Lamarche¹, Maxine Dumas Pilon², Clare Liddy³, Erin Keely³, Gerard Farrell⁴, Alexander Singer⁵, Véronique Nabelsi⁶, Isabelle Gaboury¹, Marie-Pierre Gagnon⁷, Carolyn Steele Gray⁸, Jay Shaw⁸, Catherine Hudon¹, Kris Aubrey-Bassler⁴, Paula Bush², Élisabeth Côté-Boileau¹, Justin Gagnon², Mylaine Breton¹

1. Université de Sherbrooke, 2. McGill University, 3. University of Ottawa, 4. Memorial University, 5. University of Manitoba, 6. Université du Québec en Outaouais, 7. Université Laval, 8. University of Toronto

@MelanieSmithman
@BretonMylaine
@LiddyConsult
@DumasPilon
@eConsultBASE

1. What's eConsult?

An synchronous online platform connecting primary care providers and specialists regarding their patients' medical issues.



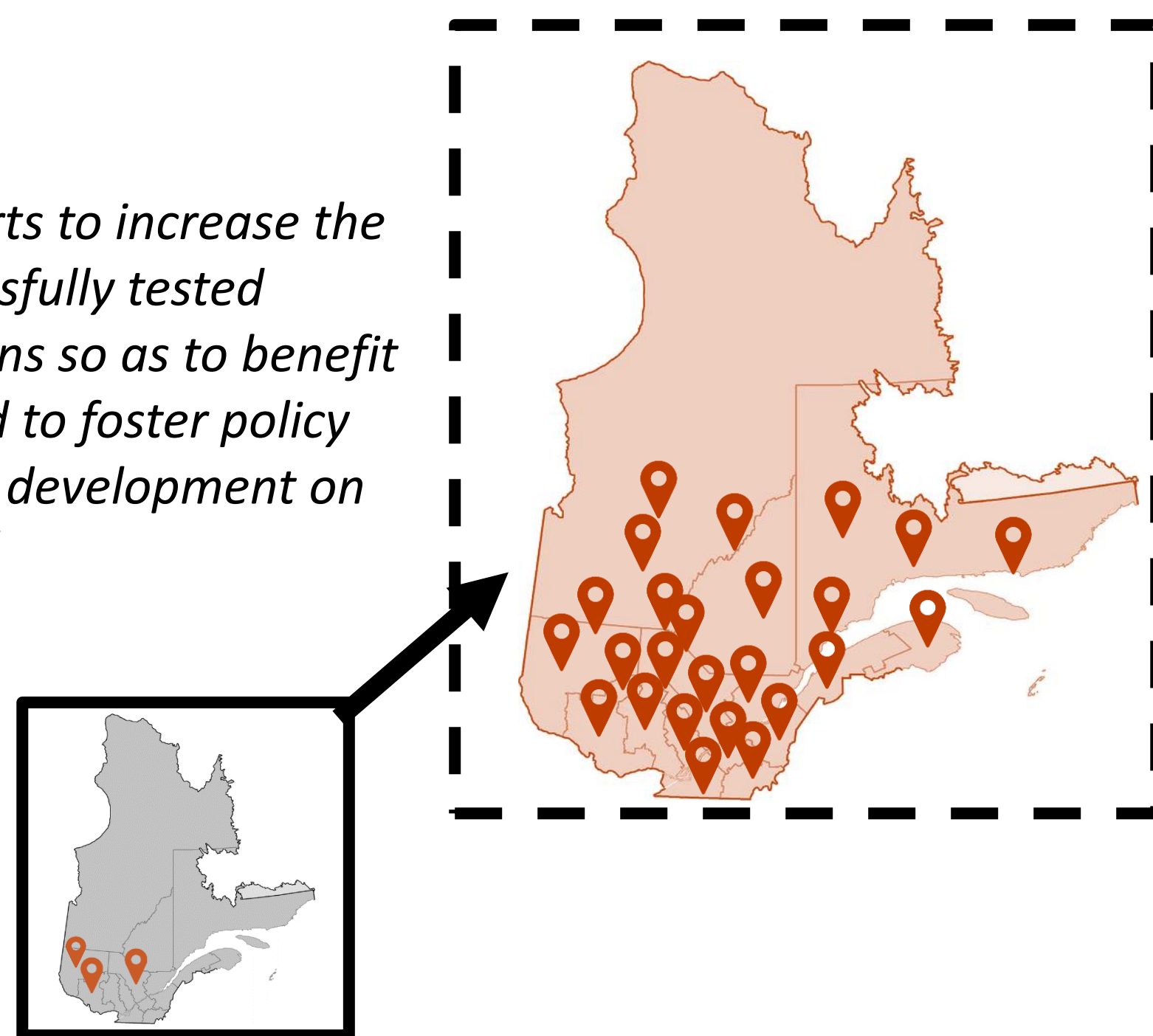
- ✓ Over 1,600 eConsults, in 25 specialties, since 2017 in Quebec¹
- ✓ 40% of face-to-face visits with a specialist avoided^{1,2}
- ✓ Increase in patient and provider satisfaction³
- ✓ Estimated cost savings of 11\$ per eConsult⁴

2. Scaling-up eConsult in Quebec

eConsult is implemented in three regions and planned to be scaled-up provincially.

Scaling up

"Deliberate efforts to increase the impact of successfully tested health innovations so as to benefit more people and to foster policy and programme development on a lasting basis."⁵



3. Objective

As a first step in understanding and supporting scale-up efforts, we aim to identify the main policy issues of scaling-up eConsult in Quebec.

4. Methods

Design: Case study of scaling-up eConsult in Quebec

Data sources (September 2018 – May 2019);

- Observations of Quebec eConsult steering committee meetings using an observation grid;
- Grey literature and internal documents (meeting minutes, reports, presentations);
- Deliberative dialogue with the steering committee (n=10 participants);
- Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (n=7 interviews).

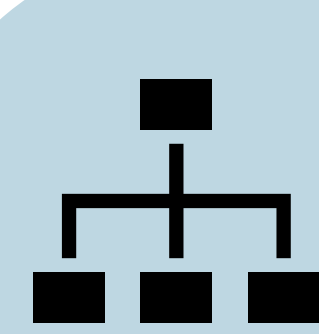
Analysis:

- Thematic analysis to identify the main policy issues.
- Issues ranked from most to least salient based on frequency and importance expressed by stakeholders.
- Member-checking with key stakeholders and experts.

References

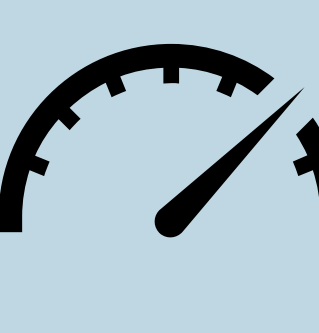
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5. Findings



Transitions in governance

Transitioning from provider-led governance structures leading regional pilot projects to government-led provincial structures



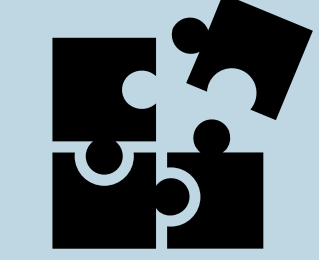
Managing growth rate

Managing the rapid growth rate (e.g. balancing primary care provider enthusiasm with careful scale-up efforts, developing a communication plan to control the growth rate)



Developing IT infrastructure

Developing information technology infrastructures to support eConsult at a large scale



Integrating with other eHealth innovations

Integrating eConsult with other innovations related to eHealth, access to specialists and interdisciplinary teams (e.g. electronic medical records, standardized referrals to specialists, use by allied health professionals)



Negotiating remuneration

Negotiating remuneration of both primary care providers and specialists for doing an eConsult and following up with patients



Complying with provincial laws

Adapting eConsult to comply with specific provincial laws



Managing quality at a large scale

Monitoring quality and managing quality improvement at a provincial level (e.g. criteria for specialist recruitment, quality of providers' questions/responses in eConsults)

6. Key messages for scaling-up an innovation

- 1) **Involving different key stakeholders:** Including a range of stakeholders, including providers, patients, researchers, and policy-makers is essential to identifying all relevant issues in the scale-up process.
- 2) **Continuously identifying issues:** As scaling-up efforts progress, different types of issues emerge – ongoing analysis of these issues is key to support scale-up.
- 3) **Considering issues in context:** While there are similarities with other provinces, scale-up issues may play out differently in Quebec because of contextual specificities.
- 4) **Building on past experience:** Key stakeholders involved in the pilot projects have a rich understanding of the innovation and of the policy issues of scaling-up. Consider and keep past experiences and knowledges developed by key stakeholders in pilot projects during the scaling-up process.

7. Conclusion

Scale-up of eConsult, with its potential to improve the delivery of care, has been met with tremendous enthusiasm from various stakeholder groups. While this rare alignment of interests between different groups is promising, many policy issues need to be considered to successfully scale-up eConsult at the provincial level. In the next phase of our study, we will seek to understand scaling-up processes in various contexts and explore strategies to address these policy issues.

m.smithman@usherbrooke.ca