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ONLINE HEALTH PROMOTION PROGRAM AND INDIVIDUALIZED HEALTH COACHING FOR VETERAN WELLBEING

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The pandemic has highlighted the need for accessible and effective health promotion as Canadians are isolated from their communities during social distancing measures. A web-based health promotion program in which participants also received individualized email-based health coaching from medical students has been available during the pandemic to empower veterans and their family members to engage in healthy lifestyle change.

Health coaches' email interactions with participants used techniques of motivational interviewing, including an empathetic style, statements of affirmation, and reflections. Open-ended questions were useful in gaining insight into the participant's current lifestyle, including habits, challenges, and coping strategies. As services have transitioned online and individuals have become more isolated, the connection formed

between online health coaches and individuals participating in the health promotion program became crucial in countering the mental and physical health repercussions of the pandemic.

In a preliminary analysis, we show that web-based health promotion with health coaching, for Canadian Veterans and their families, leads to significant weight loss, increased activity and improvement in wellbeing metrics such as sleep and stress.

The medical students acting as health coaches were able to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges involved in behaviour change, something that is seldom covered in detail in the medical school curricula. Medical students were also able to practice their motivational counseling skills surrounding lifestyle changes. Given the lack of available evidence for web-based health promotion that targets veterans and their families, these preliminary results appear promising, with longer-term follow-up planned for the next two years. ■