

How to Assess Virtual & Private Menopause Clinics

Virtual and private menopause clinics are growing in number across Canada. They provide an option for those who do not have access to a family doctor or a healthcare provider who is trained in menopause care. Some clinics focus only on menopause, while others offer care for various health issues, including menopause. This guide is designed to help you make informed choices when exploring virtual and private care options.

Key Questions to Ask:

1. Who is providing the care and what are their menopause qualifications?

- Are they licensed healthcare professionals in Canada (e.g., doctors, nurse practitioners)?
- Have they received training in menopause care from recognized organizations like the Canadian Menopause Society, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC), or The Menopause Society (formerly the North American Menopause Society), or the International Menopause Society (IMS)?
- Are they Certified Menopause Practitioners through The Menopause Society, or have they completed the International Menopause Society Professional Awareness and Recognition Training.
- If complementary health care is offered, are the providers registered practitioners in their respective fields (e.g., registered dietitian, pelvic floor physiotherapist, psychologist, etc.)?

2. Is there a cost—and what's included?

- Is the clinic part of the public healthcare system (fees are covered by provincial health plans), is it private care (you need to pay for services), or is it a combination? If a fee is charged, find out what is included (ongoing provider chats, symptom tracking, etc.)?
- Are there separate fees for assessments, tests, doctor visits, prescriptions or follow-up communication with your family doctor or specialist (if you have one)?
- If hormone testing is offered, ask if it's required at your first or follow-up visits, how it's done (blood vs. saliva), and why? Menopause Society guidelines state routine testing isn't needed to diagnose menopause in women over 45 with typical symptoms, and treatment is usually guided by symptoms. Frequent testing is generally not clinically useful, especially in perimenopause when hormone levels fluctuate. Blood (serum) tests are the gold standard; saliva tests are far less reliable.
- Do you need to pay for custom compounded, unregulated hormone therapy products not approved by Health Canada? These are generally not recommended by Menopause Associations.
- Are receipts for private insurance (benefits) provided?

3. What kinds of treatments do they offer?

- Do they offer care based on guidelines from recognized menopause organizations, like the Canadian Menopause Society, The Menopause Society, or the International Menopause Society?
- Are the treatment options they offer, including hormone therapies, approved by Health Canada or recommended by international menopause society guidelines?
- Can you get the treatments from the pharmacy of your choice, or do they specify where you need to purchase them? If a virtual care provider requires you to use a specific pharmacy, they may have a financial relationship, such as being owned by them or receiving a referral fee.

- If they offer compounded hormones, pellets, or supplements, do they explain the evidence for their use—and disclose that national and international menopause societies do not recommend them?
- If they prescribe testosterone (indicated off label to treat low sexual desire in post-menopausal women) ask how your levels will be monitored. Global consensus guidelines recommend using doses that keep testosterone within the normal range for women. Safe practice is to check levels early after starting treatment and then as needed, based on your symptoms and health profile.

Off-label use is when a doctor prescribes a medicine for something other than what it was approved for. This is common and happens when research or experience shows that the medicine can help in another way. It doesn't mean the medicine is unsafe – it just hasn't gone through the full approval process for that specific use. For example, some antidepressants are prescribed off-label in Canada to help with menopause symptoms.

4. Will they provide personalized, evidence-based care with follow-up support?

- Are treatment plans customized to your symptoms, needs and medical history?
- Is your medical history reviewed and evaluated?
- Is hormone therapy discussed as one of several options, based on your health background and current needs?
- Do they look at your health broadly including physical symptoms, mood, sleep, sexual function, metabolic health, genitourinary symptoms and lifestyle?
- Does the clinic offer follow-up care, or is it a one-time consultation?
- Will the clinic communicate with your family doctor or specialist (if you have one) to ensure your treatment plan is coordinated?

5. How is personal health information protected? How will the provider store and protect your personal health information? In Canada, health providers must follow federal and provincial privacy laws to keep your records safe.

What to Look For in a Virtual or Private Clinic

- Medical doctors or nurse practitioners with a Canadian license to practice, with recognized menopause training or certification.
- Clear, evidence-based treatments. See information on approved menopause medications in Canada from the Canadian Menopause Society [here](#).
- Transparent pricing.
- Follow-up to care, or coordination with your regular healthcare provider, if you have one.
- Protection of your personal health information.

