

# 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.



# What to Know about Bioidentical Hormone Therapy

***Bioidentical hormone therapy*** is a widely used term that often causes confusion.

“Bioidentical” is a marketing term, not a medical one. It refers to hormones with the same molecular structure as the hormones our bodies produce. Sometimes these hormones are also called “body identical”. It is important to know that all hormone products are made in a lab, except conjugated equine estrogen, which comes from the urine of pregnant horses.

Most people do not need to pay out of pocket for compounded products to get bioidentical hormones in Canada. The claim that only compounded versions are truly bioidentical is not true. Many bioidentical hormone medications are approved by Health Canada and covered by most private health benefit plans.

The Menopause Society (endorsed by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada and the Canadian Menopause Society) notes:

“Compounded bioidentical hormone therapy presents safety concerns, including minimal government regulation and monitoring, overdosing and underdosing, presence of impurities and lack of sterility, lack of scientific efficacy and safety data, and lack of a label outlining risks.”

It also states that custom-compounded hormones should only be considered when someone has an allergy or sensitivity to an approved product or needs a dosage unavailable commercially.

Read the full 2022 Menopause Society guidelines here: [The Menopause Society Position Statement](#).



While medical guidelines prioritize hormone therapies approved by Health Canada because of their proven safety and consistency, personal choice is important. Some women prefer custom-compounded treatments because they value the personalized approach and care they receive from certain providers. Others may need a dose or ingredient that is not available in pharmaceutical-grade medications. For testosterone, access can be even more limited—most doctors are unfamiliar with prescribing it for women, so it is often only available through a specialist or private clinics, which may offer compounded testosterone. Health Canada-approved testosterone for men can also be prescribed off label for women at much lower doses.

Many women wonder about the difference between Health Canada approved hormone therapy and compounded bioidentical hormones. Here's a quick comparison to help clarify:

Health Canada–Approved Hormone Therapy	Custom-Compounded Hormone Therapy
Regulated and tested for safety, purity, composition, efficacy and consistency	Not subject to the same regulatory oversight
Covered by many drug plans	Typically paid out of pocket
Standardized doses	Custom-made in compounding pharmacies
Evaluated in clinical trials	Limited safety and efficacy data

*While compounding pharmacies in Canada are regulated by provincial or territorial pharmacy authorities or colleges, the custom-made hormone therapies they produce are not approved by Health Canada.*

The Menopause Foundation of Canada believes that women deserve accurate, evidence-based information to understand the differences between treatment options. This enables them to confidently make decisions that reflect their personal values, health needs and life circumstances.