



**How Are
You?**

I'm not sure

Great! a bit frustrated today!

NOT SO GOOD I'm exhausted

pretty good

Enjoying the day

It would help to talk

Connected for Well-Being

**An Update on the
WelTel Pilot Project**

by
Rochelle Morandini
Director, Member Health and Well-being,
BCPVPA

We are sure you will agree that there is a critical relationship between healthy leaders and healthy schools. The BCPVPA's investment in WelTel is part of our Association's work to support our Principals' and Vice-Principals' health and well-being, and to help them to thrive in BC's public education system so that they can continue to positively impact the climate in their schools. Ultimately, we see this as an investment that also benefits BC's students.

For those not familiar with WelTel, it is a leading evidence-based digital health solution for equitable, relationship-based care. Although the service is primarily used in the health sector, we quickly saw an opportunity to extend this innovative platform within the education sector. Using two-way text messages, we could maintain a connection to members and quickly respond to arising needs.

BCPVPA launched the WelTel text messaging support to a pilot group of 100 members in late April 2021. Our initial objectives in launching the WelTel pilot included:

- **Helping members feel connected**, particularly those in isolated communities and sole leaders within schools.
- **Early identification of members who may be struggling**; as our *Thriving in Education* research has demonstrated, Principals and Vice-Principals are a population who will continue to show up to fulfill their purpose, regardless of the impact on their mental health and well-being. If the WelTel tool could identify those members in need, we could quickly bridge them to help.
- **Promotion of member resilience** and, in some cases, prevention of workplace absence.

BCPVPA Long Term Disability (LTD) Plan claims have been increasing steadily – particularly since the onset of the pandemic – with an alarmingly accelerated rate of mental illness. By the time a Principal or Vice-Principal requires time away from work, they are burnt out and this can result in a long and difficult recovery. We were interested to see if the WelTel pilot

would make it easier and safer for members to reach out for help.

The BCPVPA Experience

Every Monday at noon, the WelTel system sends a text to all participants, simply saying, “How are you?” The intent of this message is for the Member to pause and reflect on how they are doing. When the member has a moment, they may respond to the text in as little – or as much – detail as they like. The system then sorts their text responses into three different categories:

Green Doing OK

A response of “Good”, or “Fine”, or “OK” would get logged into the green area.

Yellow Unrecognizable

Often our members' responses end up in yellow, as they provide a lengthier response and the system cannot differentiate between OK and Not OK. This is fine, and we value the opportunity for deeper dialogue.

Red Not OK

Responses such as “Tired” or “Exhausted” would show up in the Not OK section.

The intent of the system is to reach a large number of respondents in an efficient manner. In the health sector, if a response is categorized as red, or even possibly yellow, the health expert would reach out with a return text to query what is needed. Green responses would not require the time needed for health intervention outreach.

For our BCPVPA pilot, we decided that we would respond to everyone, regardless of how their response is categorized.

BCPVPA Executive Director Kevin Reimer and I share the responsibility for responding to members on WelTel, and we feel that the project has helped us in establishing and strengthening relationships with the members. Even early in the project, participants

seemed to welcome the regular and immediate dialogue.

Members were invited to share as much or as little as they would like. The intent of the process was to support their own reflection, and offer the opportunity to respond as needed. Each week, there were regular responses from about 75 – 80 members.

We quickly saw an openness in being vulnerable, and a willingness to share both work challenges and personal challenges. Kevin and I really honour this trust and openness. It has enabled us to reach out swiftly to offer support, or direct members to resources. In particular, we have referred many members to the BCPVPA Early Intervention Program for immediate coaching and counselling. We have also been able

to quickly respond to workplace challenges, and refer members to our Member Support Services colleagues to help address any district issues, or concerns related to conflicts with staff or parents.

Participant Experience

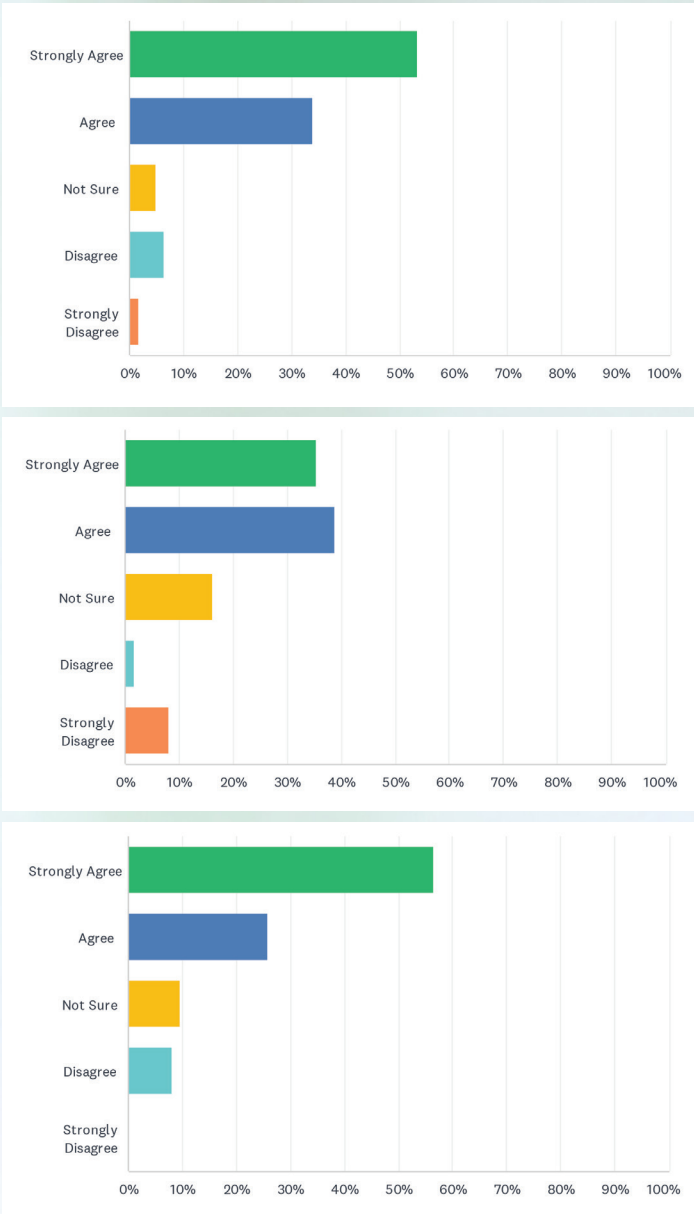
When we launched this pilot, we were not sure what to expect, and what the full value would be for our members and the BCPVPA, but we embraced this innovation with hope.

We issued a feedback survey in late February 2022 to measure how our pilot participants felt about the experience. More than 75% of pilot participants who respond regularly provided their feedback, and here is what we learned.

The weekly text message *"How Are You?"* does make me stop to reflect how I am doing

The process of receiving and responding to the text message has been valuable to my overall well being

I would recommend the BCPVPA / WeITel reach-out if a peer was interested



BCPVPA WeITel Project Survey February 2022 - 62 participant responses

“The responses from Rochelle and Kevin were often encouraging, humorous or thought-provoking. It helped me to be candid about how I was truly feeling.”

“Thank you. I valued the minute I took each week to really ask myself to answer the question with reflection.”



“I liked knowing I was being checked on. I felt supported. It made it easier to ask for help rather than making a call directly to the BCPVPA. I don’t think I would have. I would have felt my issue wasn’t big enough (even though the PVPA encourages us to reach out).”

Participant Comments

The survey included open-ended questions that allowed members to share their experience.

There were a handful of responses stating that those members did not find the process helpful. However, the majority of responses were very positive. Themes from the feedback include:

- A feeling of **connection**, particularly for those who are lone school-based leaders
- A feeling of **appreciation**, that someone reached out and cared
- Feeling **heard** and **supported**
- Gratitude for a **safe space** to share
- Acknowledgement of the **relationships** created through the project, and their value, particularly during this difficult past year.

Other Benefits We Experienced During the Pilot

At the BCPVPA, we were pleasantly surprised by other learnings gathered during this process:

1) Each week, Kevin and I notice patterns of activity or concern that our members are experiencing across the province. One week, things appear to be going well overall with most members. Another week, the majority of members are struggling. It has been interesting to see that there is often a ‘theme’ to the week – for example, in one week we may see many responses mentioning the need to fill in for staff shortages. We have gained more insight into what is happening on the ‘frontlines’.

2) I personally take the opportunity in the dialogue to share health tips or resources based

on general comments that arise. Members may not be in immediate need of support, but may benefit from some content, direction to publications, or simply a discussion on health tips. This has provided me with an opportunity to establish a presence, a relationship of trust, and a sense of safety for members who may in future need to reach out for help with their health, well-being, or disability concerns.

3) Most importantly, WeITel has helped us to create a psychologically safe place for members to state exactly how they are feeling. We began the pilot thinking that people would say “I’m good”, or “Tired today”, or “Struggling”. What we have found is that members have been very ‘raw’ in their responses, very vulnerable, and feeling the safety to vent as they need. Even if nothing further is needed, just having that listening ear available seems to be enough for some members.

One learning that we anticipated was the number of increased members we directed to our Early Intervention Program through humanworks. This pilot has demonstrated the clear need for members to have readily available psychological health supports from experts who are knowledgeable of the challenges faced by school leaders. However, as a member-funded organization, we have a limited budget. This pilot has clearly highlighted the significant need for increased mental health resources to be provided through public health, as well as by school districts. The BCPVPA continues our efforts to advocate for these types of support at the Ministry and district level.

Expanding the WeITel Outreach

We will be expanding the WeITel outreach to another 100 members, and have already sent out the invitations for those to participate. We appreciate that this may not be a tool that suits everyone.

“I enjoyed the experience and feel that touching base was helpful in reflecting on my feelings, strength, physical health, and gratitude.”

“Empathy is appreciated. Recognizing challenges and understanding frustration. Suggesting supports if necessary.”



Courtesy Anthony Tran, unsplash.com

“I have gone through several unexpected difficult situations and have found tremendous support through the weekly check-in. The staff responding have been caring and concerned and have supported me through their personal reaction as well as directing me to further support/resources when necessary. I am so very grateful to be part of this weekly check-in.”

The BCPVPA's ideal goal would be to have this outreach available for every interested member. We are, however, constrained by the limited resources (*primarily Kevin's and my availability*) to respond to each WelTel text.

We are looking at ways to fund an expansion through grants and Ministry requests. The BCPVPA has also been partnering with WelTel to meet with other decision makers in the education sector to explore ways of bringing this concept forward to support vulnerable students and teachers, and demonstrate the overall need for people to feel connected and safe to reach out for help.

The BCPVPA and WelTel are also looking at different ways to efficiently utilize the tool to reach more members in need. Initial ideas being considered include:

- Reducing the frequency of outreach from weekly to bi-weekly, and outreach to groups in alternating weeks, to facilitate reaching more members.
- Setting up members on the platform for short periods of time when support is needed most. For example, when there are natural disasters in a region of the province, inviting Principals and Vice-Principals in those areas to join the platform for a few months of regular support.

- Arranging for a health expert to respond to the text as required to give immediate support and/or direct to other resources.

If you are interested in learning more, or interested in participating, please reach out to Rochelle Morandini at rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca

Final Thoughts

Studies show that people who are more connected to family, friends, or their community are happier, physically healthier, and live longer, with fewer mental health problems than people who are less well connected.

Check out more on the value of relationships and your mental health by reading "The Learning Brain: Investing in Relationships While Social Distancing" bit.ly/TLB_IRWSD.

We also know that taking a pause in our day, and being self-aware, is important to how we assess and regulate our own well-being and how we identify when we may need to reach out for support.

The WelTel experience has demonstrated the value of taking this quick time out for self-reflection, and the uplifting health experience of feeling connected, both for the pilot participants and for our staff.



WelTel is the original two-way texting solution in patient engagement and virtual care.

**Find out more about the
WelTel story:**

www.weltelhealth.com