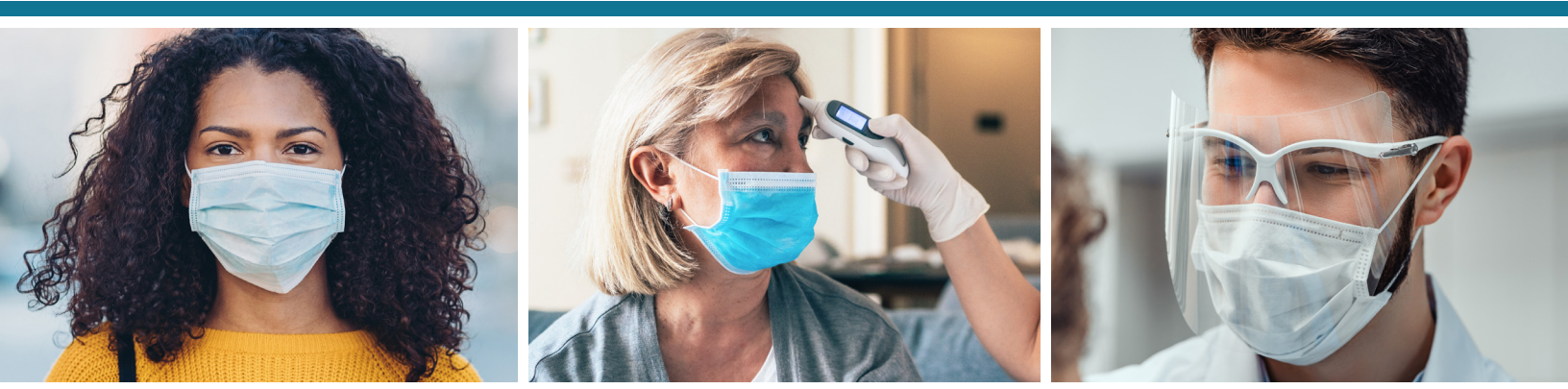


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COVID-19 RECOVERY PHASE RECOMMENDATIONS

July 2020

“I am an RN working for the Federal Government on a reserve. During the first wave of COVID-19 I suffered from April to the end of July with a painful back. Being a front-line worker, my Chiropractic treatments allow me to be able to function at my job. It has taken me weeks to be able to be almost pain free.”

- Kelly Hayter, RN, Front-Line Healthcare Worker

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The COVID-19 pandemic has placed severe strain on Canada's healthcare system. In addition to the burden of the virus itself, the pandemic has intensified pre-existing issues such as limited access to primary care and an overreliance on opioids for pain management.

This submission offers three recommendations from the Canadian Chiropractic Association that the Government of Canada should implement as part of its COVID-19 recovery efforts.

In Canada, almost five million people rely on a chiropractor every year to help them prevent or manage the serious burden of musculoskeletal pain and disease. The Canadian Chiropractic Association (CCA) - a national association representing Canada's more than 9,000 licensed chiropractors - advocates on national issues that impact the musculoskeletal health of Canadians.

Musculoskeletal conditions such as back pain, headaches, neck pain, and diseases of the muscle and joints are having a devastating impact on Canadians' health, workforce participation and the economy. Each year, more than 11 million Canadians suffer from musculoskeletal conditions and by 2031 this number is projected to grow to an alarming 15 million.¹ According to the 2019 Canadian Pain Task Force Report, the combined direct and indirect cost of chronic pain in Canada is estimated to be between \$56 - \$60 billion per year.² As the government begins to put together recovery measures, this figure should be considered.

As a regulated health profession with spinal manipulation as a core competency and diagnosis within their scope of practice, chiropractors are uniquely positioned to help Canada's COVID-19 recovery efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed unprecedented demand on Canada's healthcare resources; chiropractors' expertise as primary contact healthcare providers specializing in musculoskeletal conditions and disease is needed more than ever to support Canada's recovery efforts and to improve healthcare access for all Canadians.

By working together, we believe we can forge a path to recovery that ensures access to patient-centered and evidence-based care. To achieve our mutual COVID-19 recovery goals, the CCA recommends the following:

Recommendation 1:

- That the government work closely with provincial and territorial counterparts to devise strategies to avoid the closure of chiropractic clinics during future phases of the pandemic to ensure that Canadians suffering from musculoskeletal conditions and disease have access to timely care. It is essential that Canadians who suffer from these conditions are not being forced to suffer in silence, schedule an appointment with a primary care provider or being compelled to visit an emergency department for treatment. Chiropractors are engaging best practices in infection control in clinics and are prepared to do their part to support Canada's healthcare system during the pandemic.

Recommendation 2:

- That the government foster inter-professional collaboration between healthcare professionals across the country to improve the current approach to pain management by enhancing integration of, and access to, non-pharmacological alternatives, such as chiropractic care.

Recommendation 3:

- That the government work closely with provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure chiropractic care is integrated into interdisciplinary rehabilitation teams to help COVID-19 patients with musculoskeletal conditions recover.

“Since returning to practice I have treated many nurses, ICU pharmacists, paramedics, police officers, and a plethora of other essential front-line workers. While I was shuttered in for 11 weeks on my couch, they were continuing to serve our community, and the physical demands of their jobs manifested in wide array of musculoskeletal ailments.

Lab assistants are working overtime to process COVID-19 tests. Nurses are run off of their feet with the healthcare system opening back up. I have been overwhelmed by the positive feedback from these patients since we have re-opened our clinics. Many have stated that they were anxiously awaiting their appointments due to the aches and pains they were experiencing after almost 3 months of no care.

I am sharing this to ask you, on behalf of our front-line workers, please allow us to provide care if a second wave hits our country. I believe with the extraordinary demands being placed upon these professionals, the least we can do is be there to help keep them moving as pain free as possible.”

- Dr. Liam Ryan, Nova Scotia

Recommendation 1:

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a prolonged period of increased demand on Canada’s already overburdened healthcare system. Further compounding the issue is the fact that community practitioners such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists and chiropractors were until recently either closed or limited to providing only urgent patient care due to COVID-19 mitigation efforts.

Musculoskeletal conditions, including back and neck pain, are among the most prevalent and costly of chronic conditions, and one of the leading causes for emergency room visits.³ For the Canadian economy to recover, it is essential that these Canadians have access to the necessary tools and care they need to manage their conditions. Data demonstrates that many Canadians require chiropractic care on an ongoing basis to effectively manage their conditions; they may not be acute enough to qualify for ‘urgent’ care, yet their condition(s) will deteriorate if left untreated.

The needs of the millions of patients described above did not go away during the COVID-19 closure period; on the contrary, in many cases their conditions may have intensified as they worked from home, reduced their physical activity due to quarantine, or experienced flares due to lack of social interaction and self-isolation.

In a recent survey, fifty-eight percent of Canadians reported that they missed work or found it harder to do their job because of chronic pain.⁴ When asked to describe how their condition and/or chronic pain caused them to miss work or made it harder to do their job, tiredness or fatigue was by far the number one factor (51%), followed by time off for healthcare appointments (35%), difficulty concentrating (32%) and leaving work early due to feeling ill (31%).⁵

As demonstrated above, pain and musculoskeletal conditions have an impact on productivity. Chiropractors can help reduce public healthcare costs and pressures on the system by ensuring that people with musculoskeletal conditions can receive the care that they need when they need it.

Chiropractors have always provided care within a safe environment as mandated by their standards of practice. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CCA has provided chiropractors with resources to implement enhanced infection prevention and control policy. This includes instructional videos, guidelines, action plans for virtual and in-person care, and a PPE supply program ensuring access to high-quality supplies. In accordance with public health best practices, our partner provincial associations have also instituted

additional precautions around screening, disinfecting, ensuring physical distancing within clinics, use of PPE and other safeguards.

The CCA requests that the government work closely with their provincial and territorial counterparts to devise strategies that ensure that chiropractic clinics can remain open during future phases of the pandemic for patients who require ongoing care. Chiropractors follow all public health directives and are properly equipped to provide care safely in pandemic conditions. Utilizing the expertise of chiropractors will divert patients from emergency departments, help curb the spread of the virus and reduce the impacts to Canada's economy as a result of the impacts of musculoskeletal conditions and chronic pain on absenteeism and productivity.

"I'm a Registered Nurse who sees Dr. Chelsea Lillbeck. I am requesting that you consider that Chiropractic services remain open during any future waves of COVID-19. Dr. Lillbeck is taking every precaution from wearing a mask, asking clients to wear masks, requiring hand sanitization when entering and screening client's upon entry. It was difficult to manage chronic conditions during the spring closure, not to mention an acute issue."

- Carrie Holland, RN, BN IBCLC CCHN(C)

Recommendation 2:

The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the ongoing opioid crisis across Canada. Recent reports from British Columbia, Ontario, and Alberta indicate that opioid-related overdoses are on the rise. After seeing a sharp increase in drug overdose deaths since social distancing measures began, Toronto Public Health recently issued a request for urgent action by the federal and provincial governments to address the crisis.⁶ Similar calls have been issued by other jurisdictions across the country as the situation continues to deteriorate quickly in many cities including Thunder Bay, Ottawa, Vancouver, Winnipeg, and Edmonton.

In May, British Columbia reported the highest number of deaths due to opioids ever recorded for a single month in the history of the province. This is in large part due to the impacts of the pandemic which have resulted in isolating drug users and disrupting the supply chain. In response, the B.C. Coroners' Service recently called upon the federal government to take strong action and approach the epidemic as boldly as it has in dealing with the pandemic.⁷

There are many factors that have contributed to Canada's opioid crisis, and an evidence-based, multi-factorial approach is essential to reduce its scale and harms. One thing we can be certain of is the first exposure to opioids, whether for an acute or chronic condition, creates a risk.

First exposure commonly occurs through a prescription. For example, Canadians suffering from musculoskeletal pain are often prescribed opioids as the first line of treatment. In fact, low back pain is one of the primary causes for over-use of prescribed opioids.⁸ This, even though chiropractors have the necessary training and expertise to diagnose and treat musculoskeletal conditions including low back pain.

As one of Canada's largest primary contact healthcare professions and as specialists in non-pharmacological pain management, chiropractors are well-positioned to support efforts aimed at reducing opioid overprescribing. Chiropractors are experts in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of musculoskeletal conditions, as well as the management of pain caused by these conditions. Research in clinical settings shows that through chiropractic management of pain, reliance on opioids can be drastically reduced.⁹

The government should address the worsening opioid epidemic and foster interprofessional collaboration across the country aimed at providing greater access to non-pharmacological alternatives through prompt triage and referral of patients.

"I have been actively treating front line health care workers, including front line paramedics and COVID-19 specific nurses. The value that these professionals place on their chiropractic care cannot be understated. We have been able to help them effectively manage the physical stresses of their jobs, especially during the pandemic. As essential providers, it is imperative to ensure that they have access to the essential resources they require, including chiropractic care. As regulated health professionals, chiropractors are well positioned to practice safely under pandemic restrictions."

- Dr. Brad Kane, President, Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors

Recommendation 3:

To date, more than 60 per cent of Canada's COVID-19 patients have recovered.¹⁰ However, many patients will still require ongoing care with the goal of improving long-term outcomes. This is especially true for Intensive Care Unit (ICU) survivors who can undergo post-intensive care syndrome (PICS), with symptoms including dyspnoea, anxiety, depression, prolonged pain, impaired physical function and poor quality of life.¹¹ For up to 85 per cent of individuals with such impairments, dysfunction can continue for up to 5 years.¹²

Chiropractors work extensively with patients who have mild to severe disability in multidisciplinary rehabilitation settings and can use their skills to address impairments that are common after a prolonged illness or ICU stay, such as muscle weakness, musculoskeletal pain, extremity function, balance and mobility, and physical activity limitations.¹³

Researchers recommend meeting this challenge through the following interventions: (1) delivering interdisciplinary rehabilitation that is initiated early and continued throughout the acute hospital stay, (2) providing patient/family education for self-care after discharge from inpatient rehabilitation at either acute or subacute settings, and (3) continuing rehabilitation care in the outpatient setting and at home through ongoing therapy either in-person or via telehealth.¹⁴ Chiropractors can take leadership within all these interventions and use their education, skills, and training to play a role in the treatment and rehabilitation of post-COVID-19 patients.

The government should endeavor to work closely with provincial and territorial counterparts to promote inclusion of chiropractors in acute rehabilitation teams within hospital settings, as well as in outpatient and community settings as part of the COVID-19 recovery measures. This will maximize practitioners' ability to improve post-COVID-19 quality of life across the country's healthcare systems.

"The most common conditions I see when treating front line workers includes headaches, low back pain and radicular pain into the arm and hand from the neck. It is difficult enough to focus on everyday living with these issues, let alone taking care of someone else's life. I am very grateful that our frontline workers put their trust in me to help them stay as healthy and pain free as possible!"

- Dr. Stephanie Johnston, Toronto, Ontario

“My name is Dr. Spencer Bell, I am a sports chiropractor at Back to Function in Orillia, Ontario. We have been following all directives from the CCO and Ministry of Health since the beginning of the COVID-19 situation and I wanted to provide some input on the impact of chiropractic services on front line workers.

Throughout our initial closure, we only conducted care on emergency patients (defined as those who would otherwise attend an emergency room). This patient pool was small but included an important population of first responders and front-line workers who had sustained significant musculoskeletal injuries working during the pandemic.

One notable issue facing our hospital and first responders in this area, and likely in other areas, was the initial hesitation of many frontline workers to perform their duties - and understandably so, especially those with young families. Of course, this thinned out the available workforce in a time of high demand. In such a time, injury to a depleted workforce is extremely detrimental, and adds stress and resource shortage during an already precarious time.

I can speak only specifically to our clinic, but we were able to help roughly a dozen front-line workers minimize their time lost due to injury and maintain their duties during a time of need. In addition to being grateful, their consistent comments revolved around their relief at resuming duties, since replacement workers were unavailable during this period. This also relieved the burden on our local emergency department by removing the need for assessment of musculoskeletal injuries for which chiropractors are extremely well trained.

The chiropractic community has done a wonderful job of using evidence-based principles to educate, treat, and rehabilitate front-line workers for a long time. At no time in history have our services been more valuable - or highly sought after - to maintain this critical high functioning front-line team to protect our community.”

- Dr. Spencer Bell, RCCSS Sports Chiropractic Resident, Ontario

Conclusion

Chiropractors are committed to playing an active role in ensuring that Canada’s COVID-19 recovery plan supports the health of Canadians and ensures the sustainability of our healthcare system. To facilitate this the CCA urges the Government of Canada to immediately implement these recommendations in order to reduce public healthcare costs and pressures on the system, address the intensifying opioid crisis, better support Canadians suffering from the burden of musculoskeletal pain, disease and disability, and reduce the impact to Canada’s economy during the COVID-19 recovery phase.

The first recommendation, working closely with provincial and territorial governments to ensure that chiropractic clinics can remain open during subsequent waves of the pandemic can ensure that patients requiring ongoing or urgent care have access to the care they need. Implementing this will also help divert patients from Emergency Departments and help curb the spread of the virus.

The second recommendation, fostering collaboration between healthcare professionals across the country to reduce

the overreliance on opioids in the treatment of pain can reduce opioid overprescribing by reducing first exposure to opioids and embedding non-pharmacological pain management as essential primary healthcare across Canada.

The third recommendation, promoting and including chiropractors to contribute to post-COVID-19 rehabilitation, will help lower the burden of disability and improve quality of life for countless survivors.

The chiropractic profession stands ready to help support Canada's national pandemic recovery efforts. Chiropractors have shown that they can provide safe and effective care in our 'new normal' with the virus still very much in our midst. It is important to ensure that chiropractic services continue to be available to support our communities as we begin to recover from the first phase of the pandemic.

"My name is Dr. Chelsea Lillbeck and I am a chiropractor servicing Thompson Manitoba and the surrounding areas in Northern Manitoba. This area has as population base of 12,000 people within the city and a further 45,000 people in the drawing area of the surrounding Northern communities. As I am the sole practitioner above the 54th parallel, many patients drive over four hours to obtain treatment. The vast majority of my patient base are front-line workers, including doctors, nurses, RCMP officers, paramedics and firefighters. It is imperative to keep them all working at optimal levels to provide care for the rest of the community.

I am taking every precaution within my practice to ensure each and every patient's safety, from pre-screening patients, sanitization methods and appropriate PPE requirements including face coverings for all who enter the clinic. This is also to protect me and my staff.

After the removal of my care with the clinic shut down, it was a mad rush for many patients to return for treatment of chronic issues, as well as new acute injuries that have begun due to injury while we were operationally closed. It was in this time I saw the importance of the clinic continuing to treat the front-line workers; it is an essential part of their care and management.

It is also important to note, the additional pressure that was added to our emergency room was immense; lower back, headaches and costothoracic joint strains were increased during this time as patients did not have another alternative for care.

To ensure the health of our front-line staff during this unprecedented global crisis, please consider the consequences to the health of those we count on most should we face another wave."

- Dr. Chelsea Lillbeck, Thompson, Manitoba

"Pain and dysfunction did not stop during COVID despite COVID forcing allied health providers to stop. Treating frontline workers with musculoskeletal injuries or conditions kept them able to treat their own patients in the front lines."

- Dr. Kirsten Baxter, Sherwood Park, Alberta

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