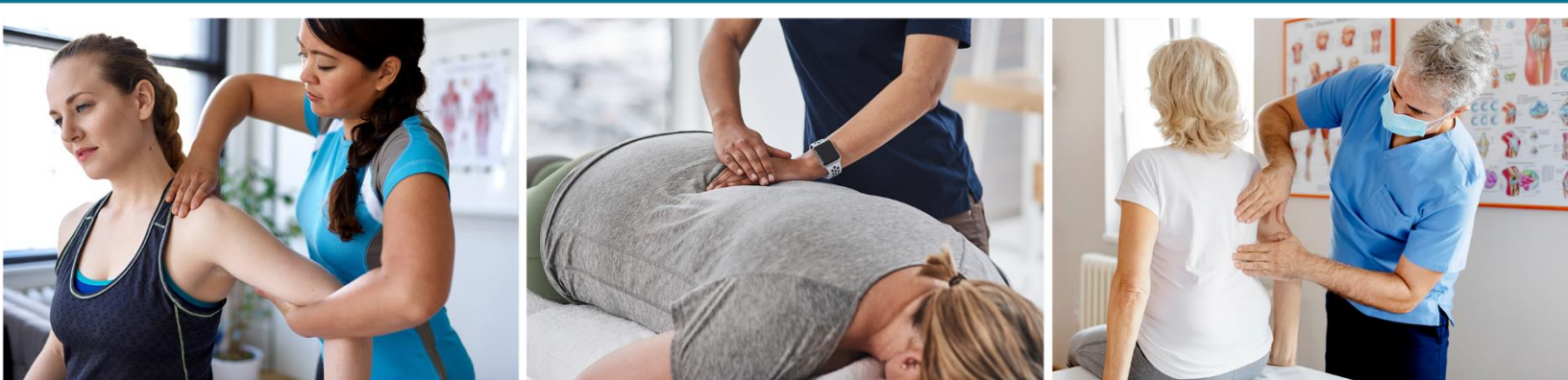


Association
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Canadian
Chiropractic
Association

Musculoskeletal Health: A priority for Canadians and Canada's Economic Recovery



2021 Policy Recommendations



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Recommendations:

The Canadian Chiropractic Association endorses the adoption of the following policy recommendations to promote active and healthy lifestyles for Canadians, and support an accelerated Canadian economic workforce recovery:

- 1. Extend the mandate of the Canadian Pain Task Force (CPTF) by an additional year to focus explicitly on developing an implementation strategy to address the epidemic of musculoskeletal pain and disease.**
- 2. Ensure that chiropractic services are accessible by Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members by removing the requirement of physician referral and the cap on the number of treatment visits.**

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed an unprecedented demand on Canada's healthcare resources, exacerbating the long-standing epidemic of musculoskeletal pain and disease in Canada. Musculoskeletal conditions such as back pain, headaches, neck pain, and diseases of the muscle and joints continue to have 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 Health Canada, the total direct (healthcare) and indirect (lost production) cost of chronic pain in 2019 was \$38.2 - \$40.3 billion. By 2030, the total cost is expected to increase by 36.2 per cent and reach \$55 billion.² The economic cost of musculoskeletal conditions specifically is an estimated \$22 billion annually.³

As the national association representing Canada's more than 9,000 licensed chiropractors, the Canadian Chiropractic Association (CCA) offers these recommendations to bring attention to the epidemic of musculoskeletal pain and disease in Canada. It is our belief that addressing this crisis will support Canadians' health and Canada's economic recovery.

Move Forward with Implementing *An Action Plan for Pain in Canada*

Musculoskeletal conditions such as back pain, headaches, arm or neck strain and diseases of the muscle and joints are having a devastating impact on the health, quality of life, and workforce participation of Canadians, as well as on Canada's economy. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic cost of musculoskeletal conditions in Canada was an estimated \$22 billion annually, and it remains a leading reason for short and long-term disability.⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic is worsening Canada's opioid overdose crisis with many communities reporting record numbers of opioid-related deaths. The latest national data from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) confirms that 2020 was the worst year for opioid-related deaths in Canada to date.⁵ There are many factors contributing to the opioid crisis and first exposure to opioids for an acute or chronic pain condition is one of them. 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.⁶ Chiropractors have the necessary training and expertise to diagnose and treat musculoskeletal conditions including low back pain. According to the Canadian Pain Task Force (CPTF), the lack of access to non-opioid options to treat pain is one of the factors contributing to the opioid crisis.⁷ CPTF's final report, *An Action Plan for Pain in Canada*, found that people who use substances and their families often point to the lack of appropriate pain care as one of the contributors to their substance use and an impediment



to successful treatment and recovery.⁸ The implementation of the CPTF Action Plan should be a priority for government as it will ensure that Canadians suffering from chronic pain have improved access to a broader spectrum of evidence-informed pain treatments.

“Fifty-eight percent of Canadians reported that they missed work or found it harder to do their job because of chronic pain.” *Sanofi Canada*

Musculoskeletal conditions are among the most prevalent and costly of chronic conditions, and one of the leading causes for emergency room visits.⁹ Furthermore, pain and musculoskeletal conditions have an impact on productivity. 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.¹⁰ 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 the number one factor (51 per cent), followed by time off for healthcare appointments (35 per cent), difficulty concentrating (32 per cent) and leaving work early due to feeling ill (31 per cent).¹¹ 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.

Supporting the health of Canadians as they begin to gradually return to their pre-pandemic work routines will help accelerate our economic recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted some sectors of the economy more than others. Strategic and focused investments in the musculoskeletal health of Canadians will ensure that the industries more negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic - such as manufacturing, construction, retail, and tourism - are supported and can fully contribute to Canada’s economic recovery.

Emerging data is also showing that health related challenges related to working from home are on the rise. According to an Institute for Employment Studies survey, more than half of the employees working remotely due to the pandemic reported a significant increase in musculoskeletal complaints.¹² More than half of the survey respondents reported new aches and pains, especially in the neck (58 per cent), shoulder (56 per cent) and back (55 per cent), compared to their normal physical condition.¹³ This new ‘new normal’ will likely increase the need and demand for musculoskeletal treatment services, particularly chiropractic care.

There is a pressing need to recognize the impact of musculoskeletal conditions on the health and well-being of Canadians and to improve access to appropriate care. Sustaining our healthcare system requires the kinds of innovations that deliver better outcomes at a lower cost, which includes enhancing access to conservative forms of pain management. The evidence and clinical practice guidelines support the use of conservative pain management as first line interventions for many musculoskeletal conditions, including low back pain.



Canada's chiropractors are a critical part of the solution to address this growing epidemic. Each year, at least 4.7 million Canadians rely on services offered by chiropractors to prevent and manage the serious burden of musculoskeletal pain and diseases.¹⁴

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.

Policy Recommendation 1: The CCA recommends that the government extend the mandate of the Canadian Pain Task Force by an additional year to focus explicitly on developing an implementation strategy of *An Action Plan for Pain in Canada* to address the epidemic of musculoskeletal pain and disease. This measure would help enhance the current approach to pain management by improving the integration of non-pharmacological treatments and reduce the reliance on opioids in the treatment of pain.

Supporting Access to Care for Members of the Canadian Armed Forces

Among the millions of Canadians suffering from musculoskeletal pain are thousands of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members. Due to the physical demands put on active military personnel, musculoskeletal conditions like back and neck pain are double that of the general Canadian population.¹⁵ Further, musculoskeletal injury is a major occupational risk of a military career and is responsible for 42 per cent of medical releases – which is the leading cause of a military career ending as a result of a medical condition.¹⁶

“Musculoskeletal injury is a major occupational risk of a military career and is responsible for 42 per cent of medical releases” *Surgeon General's Report*

Yet, Canada's service members continue to face barriers to accessing and receiving chiropractic care. This is problematic and concerning given the increased stresses placed on the musculoskeletal health of service members in the course of their work. This includes the recent deployments in Ontario and Quebec during the pandemic to provide relief to our frontline workers and support to long-term care homes. CAF members also continue to be deployed in multiple regions overseas, such as supporting numerous NATO missions.

Most Canadians can access chiropractic care through their healthcare plans without the need for a referral. The chiropractic benefit currently available to CAF members requires a physician referral to off-base care. This referral requirement delays access to timely care



and places an additional burden on members seeking treatment for a work-related injury. Unfortunately, CAF members continue to experience barriers to care even once they are no longer active service members. This issue was noted in the CPTF's *An Action Plan for Pain in Canada* which recommended improving access to interdisciplinary care for all veterans, including to physical practice approaches.¹⁷

Evidence shows that early treatment of acute musculoskeletal conditions has a higher efficacy rate and better outcomes for patients and helps to avoid the onset of debilitating chronic conditions.¹⁸ From defending our country abroad to supporting us at home during times of crisis, we must ensure that members of our armed forces and veterans receive the care they need and deserve in a timely fashion.

In comparison, chiropractic care is well integrated into the United States military and Veterans Administration and the data is compelling. Studies commissioned by the U.S. Department of Defense demonstrate that adding chiropractic care to standard medical care is cost effective and can lead to decreased pain and disability rates while increasing satisfaction for active-duty soldiers with low back pain.¹⁹

Our military members deserve the best possible care our healthcare system can offer. During this time of increased strain on limited healthcare resources, it is especially important that care pathways be simplified, and unnecessary referral steps be eliminated wherever practical. To begin addressing the need for easier, timelier, and robust access to chiropractic care for CAF members and veterans, the requirement for a physician referral to seek treatment from chiropractors should be removed.

From defending our country abroad to supporting us at home during times of crisis, we must ensure that members of our armed forces and veterans receive the care they need and deserve in a timely fashion.

Policy Recommendation 2: CCA recommends that the government ensure that chiropractic services are accessible by Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members by removing the requirement of physician referral and the cap on the number of treatment visits.



Conclusion

The epidemic of musculoskeletal pain and disease places a serious burden on Canadians' health and the economy. Federal leadership and targeted investments are desperately needed. As Canada's musculoskeletal experts, chiropractors are a critical part of the solution and can do more to help health dollars go further. To better support Canadians suffering from musculoskeletal pain, disease and disability, the CCA urges you and your party to commit to the two policy recommendations contained in this document.

The first policy recommendation, extending the mandate of the Canadian Pain Task Force by an additional year to focus explicitly on developing a strategy to address the epidemic of musculoskeletal pain and disease, can help enhance the current approach to pain management by improving the integration of non-pharmacological treatments. Implementing this recommendation will reduce public healthcare costs and pressures on the system, as well as reduce the heavy reliance on opioids in treating pain. It will also allow more Canadians to be more active in Canada's economy and partake in our economic recovery.

The second policy recommendation, removing the physician referral requirement and the cap on the number of treatment visits for members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) who need chiropractic care, can facilitate better care for service members experiencing musculoskeletal issues and prevent delays in receiving essential treatment. Our military service members continue to play a major role in Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in supporting deployments in regions around the world and deserve improved access to care.

About Chiropractors in Canada

As one of Canada's largest primary contact healthcare professions and experts in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of musculoskeletal conditions, as well as the management of pain caused by these conditions, chiropractors are uniquely qualified to support efforts to mitigate the epidemic of musculoskeletal pain and disease and chronic musculoskeletal conditions. Chiropractic doctors complete a minimum of seven years post-graduate education, and are regulated in every province and territory.

The Canadian Chiropractic Association represents Canada's more than 9,000 licensed chiropractors and believes that Canada's economic recovery requires strategic and focused investments in the musculoskeletal health of Canadians. Targeted investments are necessary to respond to the urgent needs of Canadians suffering from the impacts of an extended work from home period, as well as help employers return to full capacity.



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