



Future of Health-Care Delivery in New Brunswick

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The future of health-care delivery in New Brunswick must be **collaborative**, **coordinated** and **evidence based**. Too often, we refer to the “health-care system” as the one entirely funded by the provincial government; however, New Brunswickers’ health-care team also includes conservative care providers that work outside the publicly funded system, including chiropractors, physiotherapists and psychologists.

The future of health-care in New Brunswick must be truly **collaborative**, with systems in place to enhance the appropriate **coordination of care**, **triage**, and **referrals**. Research strongly supports models of care that facilitate prompt access to the right provider, including allied health-care providers such as chiropractors. Thousands of regulated health-care providers, with **unique expertise**, who work in private or community-based clinics are ideally trained and competent to address the most pressing needs of the population both safely and efficiently. However, often it can take months for patients to find their way to those providers and typically only if they have extended health benefits or the means to pay out-of-pocket.

In New Brunswick, chronic pain and arthritis are among the costliest and most prevalent chronic conditions plaguing our community. Chronic non-cancer pain (or musculoskeletal conditions) is described as the silent pandemic and associated with over-use of opioids and other pharmacotherapies, surgical services, and diagnostic imaging. Musculoskeletal disorders, including back and neck pain, are a leading cause of disability, lost time at work, and reason for seeking health-care services including visits to the overburdened physicians and emergency rooms. However, the therapies that are recommended as first-line, like chiropractic, are not readily available within the public health-care system.

Transformation is defined as “a thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance”. Hence the system we know today, should look different than the one of tomorrow. The NBCA’s vision for the future of the health-care system would have all regulated health-care providers working to their **full capacity** and **within full scope** to address the conditions that they are expertly trained to treat. For example, based on competencies, chiropractors should be able to directly send requisitions for diagnostic imaging and specialty services that apply to the management of musculoskeletal conditions. This would reduce redundancy of visits to primary care providers. Hence, the Government of New Brunswick, in collaboration with health-care professions, must develop models of care that help facilitate coordination between public and parallel community sectors. This would include mechanisms that enhance triage and referral to allied health-care providers and compensate primary care providers to do so in lieu of unnecessary surgical consultations, diagnostic imaging, or other testing.

No one provider has the expertise and knowledge to do it all. However, **leveraging already existing expertise and resources to address the most pressing needs, including chronic pain, could help relieve the burden on the public system, reduce wait times and most importantly improve health outcomes for New Brunswickers.** This would also allow NB to re-invest in much needed health promotion and preventative measures including spaces for physical activity and targeted education to keep our population aging in a healthy and independent manner. As you are aware, meaningful change will require courageous choices and a serious reconsideration of the status quo based on data and the evidence.

NB Chiropractors as Part of the Solution

The data is clear, chronic conditions are the leading burden on NB's public health-care system, further compounded by a quickly aging population. Among these, musculoskeletal disorders are the most prevalent and costliest of all chronic conditions. The lack of a comprehensive chronic condition and pain strategy is leaving thousands of New Brunswickers alone to navigate a system that is ill-equipped to manage these conditions. The NBCA would support the development of comprehensive interprofessional pain management strategy that relies less on opioids and invasive interventions that would help curb costs, decrease wait times - all while improving outcomes. Increasing access and referrals to community-based providers like chiropractors and integrating them within interprofessional health-care team is a simple and effective solution.

Interprofessional teams with a full range of assessment and treatment skills in pain management approaches are quickly becoming widely accepted as effective alternatives. There are several inter-professional and innovative models being piloted (e.g., Ontario's low back pain pilot programs) and fully implemented (e.g., St. Michael's Hospital Family Health Team in Toronto, Ontario and Mount Carmel Clinic in Winnipeg, Manitoba), which have shown great promise in efficiently and safely managing acute and chronic musculoskeletal pain. Utilizing these models are leading to a reduction in prescribed opioids and minimizing unnecessary physician and emergency room visits. This has been accomplished by integrating community-based providers with chiropractors who are playing a central role in providing conservative care. As a further benefit, effective back pain triage and access to appropriate care have been shown to reduce wait times and costs associated with unnecessary services such as diagnostic imaging and specialist visits.

Chiropractors are extensively trained, with a unique expertise in the assessment, diagnosis, and management of musculoskeletal disorders like back pain, neck pain and headaches. The above model clearly demonstrates the role a chiropractor already plays to help the triage and referral of patients, and the commitment of the profession to work collaboratively with a patient's unique health-care team. However, to do so effectively, providers should be encouraged and able to practice within their full scope of practice, and to have new mechanisms in place to enhance coordination between publicly funded providers and those working within private/community-based clinics. We do not believe that greater resources are needed, but better use of existing resources which include optimizing the role and use of existing health-care personnel.

Our province can no longer make investments without considering the evidence and best practices, matched by the unique needs of our population and communities. Unless changes are made to how we manage musculoskeletal disorders, wait lists and costs are only expected to rise exponentially. Evidence shows that addressing musculoskeletal disorders in a strategic way would allow for existing health resources to be used more effectively, including allowing all regulated health-care professions to practice within their full scope. Ensuring that providers practice within their full scope has demonstrated to improve outcomes for patients. Evidence clearly supports manual therapies, including chiropractic, should be first-line options for the management of musculoskeletal disorders within an inter-professional health-care team. Such management offers a safe, effective, non-invasive, coordinated, and cost-effective alternative to opioids.

About the New Brunswick Chiropractors Association

The New Brunswick Chiropractors Association (NBCA) is the professional association representing NB's licensed chiropractors. The NBCA works with its members to improve the health and wellness of New Brunswickers by regulating, supporting, and promoting excellence in chiropractic practice and patient care.