

Association des
chiropraticiens du
Nouveau-Brunswick



New Brunswick
Chiropractors
Association

Pre-budget Submission

February 2022



NBCA PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

The New Brunswick Chiropractors Association (NBCA) is the professional association representing NB licensed Doctors of Chiropractic (or chiropractors). Every year, thousands of New Brunswickers rely on the care of chiropractors to help relieve pain, improve function, and enhance quality of life as part of their healthcare team. The NBCA works to improve the health and wellbeing of New Brunswickers by regulating, supporting, and promoting excellence in chiropractic practice and patient care.

Without a doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic has been the focus of all levels of government and top-of-mind for New Brunswickers. However, other healthcare urgencies have not waned since the start of the pandemic, in fact for many they have worsened. Notably, **chronic or recurrent musculoskeletal disorders** (or more broadly chronic non-cancer pain) are the most prevalent and costliest conditions of all chronic conditions in NB.¹ They are also the leading reasons for visiting the emergency room and family physicians, as well as leading cause of short- and long-term disability and lost time of work. Yet, musculoskeletal disorders, like back pain, neck pain and headaches, do not receive the attention they deserve.

A prosperous province depends on a **healthy and productive workforce**. Achieving the productivity gains from prevention and management of musculoskeletal disorders requires a coordinated approach and targeted investments. The NBCA does not believe that increased funding is needed, but rather rethinking the use of current resources and eliminating the 20 to 30% projected wasted resources. The following submission makes concrete recommendations to help the Government of New Brunswick achieve its objectives.

RESILIENCY TO ENSURE CONTINUED ACCESS TO SERVICES IN TIMES OF DISRUPTION

The disruptions to services observed during the COVID-19 pandemic were largely related to the ongoing workforce crisis and lack of capacity. Thus far, most of the efforts made to remedy have focused on training and recruiting professionals from only a select few professions, such as physicians and nurses. Yet, New Brunswick counts thousands of allied healthcare providers who are extensively trained, possess a unique expertise and are already available to help relieve the burden. We urge that the Government of New Brunswick continue to take steps to ensure all regulated healthcare professionals can **practice within full scope, eliminate unnecessary red tape**, and optimize the use of **existing health human resources**.

In the healthcare sector alone, there are thousands of regulated healthcare providers work outside the publicly funded and are under-utilized, even though their expertise could relieve reliance on primary and urgent care. The physician as the sole “gatekeeper” no longer serves New Brunswickers and only adds unnecessary barriers to accessing the care they need. For example, by allowing chiropractors to practice within full scope, which would include the ability to order diagnostic imaging, lab testing and refer to specialists, one would reduce the need for redundant visits to family physicians, walk-in clinics and emergency care. Notably, this could be achieved through minor changes such as the amendment of

¹ NBHC. (2016). The Cost of Chronic Health Conditions to New Brunswick. Retrieved from https://www.nbhc.ca/sites/defaultacr/files/documents/june_2016_the_cost_of_chronic_health_conditions_to_nb_-_final.pdf



the *Medical Services Payment Act* to allow specialists to be compensated to accept referrals from chiropractors.

In addition, we know that better health outcomes are achieved through team-based care which includes using technology to improve the communication and coordination between providers. Providing full access to the provincial electronic health records (EHR), including the ability to input information, for providers working in community settings would help enhance the co-management of a patient. In addition, point-of-care prompts could be developed and added to facilitate the appropriate triage and referral to community-based providers, such as chiropractors, as supported by research.

BUILDING RESILIENCY IN HEALTHCARE AND SENIOR-CARE SYSTEM

The current system will never work efficiently if the services available do not meet the **actual needs** of the population. NB's publicly funded system still prioritizes services for acute conditions (i.e., broken arm), even though the needs of New Brunswickers have shifted drastically towards chronic diseases. This is why a **paradigm shift** is desperately needed.

For chronic non-cancer pain, the research strongly supports the use of non-pharmacological, non-surgical, conservative care like exercise, education and manual therapies, including chiropractic, as first-line. Yet, often, these services are not readily available, and patients are instead referred for unnecessary imaging, prescribed medication, and even referred to specialists. This explains, in part, the 20 to 30% projected waste of resources documented in the system.

It is time for us to connect the dots. The Government of New Brunswick must invest in targeted programs of care that would allow us to tackle these pressing issues, starting with chronic non-cancer pain. The Canadian Pain Taskforce recommendations already outline the key priorities, which includes integration of allied healthcare providers in community health centers. These recommendations could be furthered strengthened using technology to facilitate rehabilitation, education, and other preventative measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Investing in a provincial pain management strategy in-line with the recommendations of the Canadian Pain Taskforce. This strategy would include evaluation framework, integration of allied healthcare providers in target community health centers, and approaches to enhance return to work and disability prevention.
2. Expand use of the provincial electronic health records system to include access for allied healthcare providers and point-of-care decision-making tools to help facilitate triage and referrals to community-based providers when appropriate.
3. Invest in new pilots that focuses on preventative care by leveraging virtual platforms, including access to health coaching, exercise classes and rehabilitation, among others. Allied healthcare professionals could play a key role in the development and delivery of programs, notably targeting seniors and those in rural and remote communities.