

Back pain is the number one cause of job disability worldwide (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, 2014).

**Chiropractic care helps manage costs**

Alberta's employers and unions face many challenges when it comes to managing benefit costs. Chiropractic care not only plays a vital role in the integration and delivery of self-referred health care, but with enhanced coverage for employees, it can also improve organizational health and productivity, and play a greater role in improving bottom line results by reduced absenteeism, disability and pharmaceutical costs.

**Direct billing: streamlining administrative processes**

Chiropractic clinics and insured patients can access direct and electronic billing. Both Alberta Blue Cross and Telus E-Claims (which provides direct billing to Great West Life) provide direct billing. The Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors is pleased to work with these organizations to bring electronic direct billing to our members and their patients.

**A Case for Chiropractic Benefits**

Chiropractic care is covered under many extended health care benefit plans as a paramedical service. Research demonstrates chiropractic care is the more clinically and cost-effective treatment for back injuries and related conditions, occupational and non-occupational. Consider adding or enhancing the chiropractic benefits available through your extended health care insurance plan or as part of an employee's health care spending account.

In 2009, Niteesh Choudry, M.D. PhD, Harvard Medical School, Brigham and Women's Hospital and Arnold Milstein, M.D., MPH conducted an analysis of the cost-effectiveness of chiropractic for neck and back pain. The authors concluded there is reasonable data to show that chiropractic could be effective and cost-efficient service for relief of pain and reduction in disability:

- In the case of neck pain, chiropractic manipulation is less costly and yields better outcomes in comparison to physician care and exercise.
- In the case of back pain, chiropractic treatment is less costly and yields improved outcomes in comparison to physical therapy.

Interesting statistics to consider:

- Neck and back pain represented the fourth highest total health and productivity cost to employers (Integrated Benefits Institute, Health and productivity as a business strategy: a multiemployer study, JOEM 2009).
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts reported substantial savings, achieved ROI targets and fostered positive relationships with network partners as a result of chiropractic service implementation (excerpt from a public report from Healthways).

**Supporting facts and figures from WCB (Alberta)**

Back pain is a leading cause of prescription and non-prescription drug use, medical visits, costly and specialized diagnostic procedures, hospitalizations, and restricted physical activity. Back claims account for more than 25 per cent of all lost-time claims reported to the WCB - Alberta.

Dr. Sally Nikolaj, Former Director, Millard Rehabilitation Centre, WCB - Alberta stated, "Our evaluation of performance data confirms that timely application of evidence-based chiropractic care represents a

very good investment with respect to return-to-work outcomes, stakeholder satisfaction and management of related costs.”

**Cost of Care for Common Back Pain Conditions Initiated With Chiropractic Doctor vs. Medical Doctor/Doctor of Osteopathy as First Physician (Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics, December 2010).**

This study featuring data from 85,000 Blue Cross Blue Shield beneficiaries concludes:

- Paid costs for episodes of care initiated by a Doctor of Chiropractic were almost 40% less than care initiated through a Medical Doctor.
- Insurance companies that restrict access to chiropractic benefits may inadvertently pay more for care than they would if they removed such restrictions.

**Alternative Medicine Integration (1999)**

Alternative Medicine Integration (AMI), a Blue Cross Blue Shield HMO provider, contracts with large self-funded employer groups and insurance companies to provide networks of traditional medical physicians and alternative medical providers, including chiropractic physicians, nutritionists and acupuncturists.

AMI's Primary Care Chiropractic Physician program data revealed:

- Overall costs were reduced by over 50% when chiropractic was used as the primary point of contact
- Hospital admissions decreased by 60%
- Hospital days decreased by 69%
- Outpatient procedures decreased by 85%
- Pharmaceutical costs decreased by 56%
- Patient satisfaction consistently in upper 90 percentiles

**Comparative Analysis of Individuals with and without Chiropractic Coverage: Patient Characteristics, Utilization and Costs (Archives of Internal Medicine, Oct. 2004; 164: 1985-1992).**

Conclusions:

- Members with chiropractic insurance coverage had lower annual total health care expenditures.
- Back pain patients with chiropractic coverage had lower rates of low back surgery, hospitalizations and lower utilization of magnetic resonance imaging.
- Patients with chiropractic coverage had lower average back pain episode related costs.
- Systematic access to managed chiropractic care not only may prove to be clinically beneficial but also may reduce overall health care costs