



THE CANADIAN CHIROPRACTIC ASSOCIATION

Presentation to the Standing Committee on Health
Chronic Diseases Related to Aging

October 17, 2011

Prevention as a mean to manage or delay chronic diseases related to aging

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Executive Summary

Preventative health care for all ages is one of the key elements of halting the advance of chronic diseases and promoting health for all Canadians.

Our two fundamental recommendations are:

- Implement progressive public education programs targeting vulnerable populations, including promoting active self-care to encourage all Canadians and communities to take responsibility for their own health;
- Support collaborative approaches among public health organizations, health care providers, governments, and the for profit and not-for-profit sectors;

These measures would have a profound, beneficial effect on healthcare and would help address chronic disease and health funding issues in Canada.

The Canadian Chiropractic Association

The Canadian Chiropractic Association (CCA) is a federated association representing the interests of the chiropractic profession in Canada through the co-operation and co-ordination of information and programming among its provincial divisions. All ten provinces plus the Yukon are represented and through them, the CCA has a membership of approximately 6,500 chiropractors representing 85% of licensed practitioners in Canada. The mission of the CCA is to help Canadians live healthier lives by informing the public about the benefits of chiropractic care, by facilitating chiropractic research, and by advocating for health care system reform to ensure equitable and accessible health care for all Canadians.

Chronic diseases related to aging in Canada

Canadians are living longer than before and are self-reporting good overall health. However, health indicators suggest they might not be living healthier¹. More than 90% of adults over the age of 65 report suffering from at least one chronic disease. Most risk factors for chronic disease, and specifically those related to aging, are preventable². Notably, 18% of Canadians, over the age of 18, is considered obese³.

Obesity is a known risk factor for heart disease, hypertension, Type 2 diabetes, and some forms of cancers⁴. Obesity has reached epidemic proportions in most Western countries and in some developing countries. At a recent UN consultation on non-communicable diseases, a number of developing countries reported that citizens are suffering from a double burden related to access to food⁵. Children are both malnourished and suffer from increasing levels of obesity due to the limited access to healthy foods. Similarities are observed in on-reserve First Nations and Aboriginal populations in Canada where health inequalities have led to increased rates of chronic diseases. Canada's Aboriginal population is two to three times more likely than the non-Aboriginal population to develop certain chronic diseases including cardiovascular problems, hypertension, diabetes and arthritis¹.

The effects of unhealthy lifestyle choices are most visible in older adults; however, the development of chronic disease begins during youth. Accordingly, prevention of disease and promotion of health must take a population-based approach that covers the full spectrum of ages, ethnicities and socio-economic demographics. It is never too late to invest in health or to promote healthy lifestyles changes.

¹ Health Canada. (2002). *Canada's Aging Population*, Ottawa: Ontario

² Healthy Aging and Wellness Working Group. *Healthy Aging in Canada: A New Vision, A vital Investment*

³ Statistics Canada. (2010). *Community Health Survey*. www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/110621/dq11021b-eng.htm

⁴ Hramiak, I. et al.(2007). Assessment of obesity and its complications in adults. *CMAJ*;176(8): online 36-49.

⁵ United Nations High-level Meeting on Non-communicable Diseases. (2011).

Investing in research

Research is fundamental to addressing chronic diseases related to aging. Research informs both treatment and prevention measures, as well as guiding public education initiatives.

The Canadian Chiropractic Research Foundation (CCRF) is the chiropractic profession's primary national research funding organization. The CCRF grants financial assistance to chiropractors who are pursuing Masters and PhD degrees and assists in establishing them in multi-disciplinary research positions. This investment is one of the ways in which the chiropractic profession nurtures a research culture while informing quality and evidence-based care. In partnership with the Canadian Institute for Health Research, CCRF has established a number of Chiropractic Research Chairs and Professorships in universities across Canada. Many of these positions devote time and effort to the study of chronic disease related to age and the treatment of age-related conditions. Such research informs practitioners on the best-practices available, and in turn, promotes better care for patients. The goal is to prevent or delay the onset of disease, or to prevent further complications from the disease.

Public education

The *Workshops on Healthy Aging: Aging and Health Practices* (Health Canada, 2001) identified four criteria needed for healthy aging: healthy eating, injury prevention, physical activity and smoking cessation⁶.

Public health workers produce a number of valuable resources to help Canadians live better and healthier lives. However, many programs are time-limited and have restricted resources that see them falter after only a few years. The use of health care providers as educators might offer sustainability to public health programs. As part of their mandate, health care providers, including chiropractors, can promote healthy living strategies to their patients. In-person coaching can modify patient behaviour while encouraging the adoption of healthy lifestyle choices.

Canadian chiropractors actively participate in the promotion of health and the prevention of disease and injury among Canadians. Specifically, as musculoskeletal experts, they promote active self-care and individual responsibility for personal health management.

The CCA has developed a number of educational resources for Canadian chiropractors and the public which promote physical activity and the prevention of injury.

Starting with children

In the area of brain injury prevention, the CCA has partnered with ThinkFirst Canada to promote the Brain Day program among elementary school children in Nunavut. The Brain Day program educates youth about the importance of injury

⁶ Health Canada. (2002). *Healthy Aging: Prevention of Unintentional Injuries Among Seniors*, Ottawa: Ontario

prevention in the hope that these approaches will also be shared with the community at large.

Encouraging physical activity

The Fit-in 15 program⁷, developed in consultation with the Public Health Agency of Canada, promotes a progressive introduction of physical activity into one's daily routine. The program is based on the concept that fitting in at least 15 minutes of physical activity a day can lead to the development of a healthy habit and the motivation to increase daily physical activity. Adults who are physically active are shown to significantly decrease their risk of diabetes, heart disease and some forms of cancer. Furthermore, by practicing weight-bearing exercises, individuals may reduce the risk of developing osteoporosis, and secondary fractures or injury.

Preventing falls in seniors

Older adults are at increased risk of developing chronic diseases related to aging and to also incur a greater risk of injury due to falls. Falls among seniors is one of the leading causes of disability and morbidity. Notably, it is estimated that senior fall-related injuries in Canada cost over \$2.8 billion dollars per year⁶. In response to this, the CCA has developed the *Best Foot Forward* campaign targeted specifically at Canadian seniors. This campaign provides practical strategies on how to prevent falls at home, and how to promote balance and strength. The program has been widely disseminated and shared with our partners. All of the self-help materials are available at no cost on the CCA website.

Collaborative approaches

The Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments have achieved an unprecedented agreement, *Declaration on Prevention and Promotion from Canada's Ministers of Health and Health Promotion/Healthy Living* (2011), to invest in health promotion and disease prevention. This initiative is commendable and will serve to inform policy.

The CCA believes that specific targeted approaches are needed for sub-groups of the population including Veterans Affairs, First Nations and Aboriginal populations, Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian Forces. These groups should be provided with the full continuum of care, including integrated service delivery, to better prevent occupational chronic conditions and/or chronic disease.

Furthermore, broader nationwide strategies to manage and prevent chronic disease related to aging should be discussed through partnerships between Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments as well as with the non-profit and private sectors. The promotion of health and prevention of disease is currently a key priority of public health agencies. However, the task at hand must also be embraced by primary contact health care providers and support workers. The promotion of a common message on healthy

⁷ www.fitin15.ca

living will have a more meaningful and significant impact when embraced by all sectors. Strong partnerships must be developed between health care providers and public health officials to ensure that educational programs are successfully and widely disseminated among the most vulnerable populations.

The role of Canada's chiropractors

Canadian chiropractors can help alleviate the burden of chronic disease among seniors by providing care and co-management to patients. The early detection of dysfunction and immediate treatment of common musculoskeletal complaints has shown to decrease the probability of chronic pain. Studies have demonstrated that chiropractic care for patients presenting with low back pain decreases the utilization of diagnostic tests, in-patient admissions, and prescriptions, including NSAIDs and opioids⁸. Qualitative benefits include improved quality of care and quality of life for patients treated within an integrative model.

Two large scale studies conducted in public facilities in the U.S. in 2004⁹ found the following for patients who were treated by a chiropractor:

- Overall costs were reduced by 28%
- Hospitalizations were reduced by 25-41%
- Back surgeries were reduced by 14-32%
- Medical imaging costs and utilization for technologies such as MRI and Xrays were reduced by 20-37%

Many communities, specifically in remote areas across Canada, are requesting greater access to care, patient choice in service delivery and the implementation of preventative health measures. Canadian chiropractors are part of the solution to these requests. Notably, chiropractors are currently working to triage patients in a number of hospitals and clinics in Canada. The progressive transition from an acute care model of health to a preventative model may help seniors maintain good health resulting in independence and greater quality of life.

The CCA believes that Canadian chiropractors must play an important role in the promotion of healthy aging and the prevention of chronic disease including musculoskeletal conditions. The inclusion of all health care providers and patients in the dialogue will deliver more innovative and sustainable solutions.

⁸ Mior, S. and al. (2006). Chiropractic in clinical setting, *OCA Annual Review 2006-2007*.

⁹ Legorreta, A. and al. (2004). Comparative analysis of individuals with and without chiropractic coverage, *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 164(18).

Conclusion

Maintaining independence and quality of life for seniors in Canada is an important goal that impacts both the sustainability of the health care system and the fabric of our society.

The Canadian Chiropractic Association recommends that dealing with the present and growing challenge of chronic diseases related to aging be based on a public health/prevention/wellness model where there are incentives for stakeholders and individuals to assume a greater degree of responsibility for healthcare outcomes.

We believe that public education combined with strong support for multi-sectoral partnerships and inter-disciplinary collaboration will yield the best results.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to the dialogue on chronic diseases related to aging.