

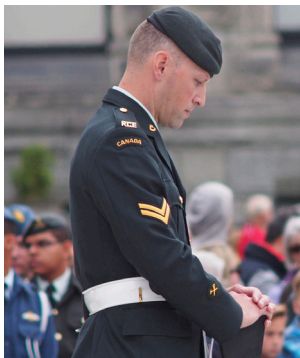
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# A HEALTHIER FUTURE FOR CANADA:

## Responding to COVID-19 and Improving Access to Primary Healthcare



*Canadian Chiropractic Association (CCA)  
2021 Pre-Budget Submission*

August 2020



# List of Recommendations

## A healthier future for Canada requires urgent efforts to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 and an increased focus on reducing the burden of musculoskeletal pain and disease.

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed additional strain on Canada's healthcare system and exacerbated pre-existing challenges Canadians have faced accessing primary healthcare.

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 impacts of COVID-19. Chiropractors can use their expertise to support vulnerable populations and address the impacts of one of the greatest healthcare burdens Canadians face: an epidemic of musculoskeletal pain and disease and chronic musculoskeletal conditions.

**To support the government's efforts in these key areas, the CCA recommends the government take the following immediate steps:**

- **Recommendation 1:** That the government allow chiropractors to be assessors for the federal Disability Tax Credit Certificate.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the government remove the impediments to timely care for members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).





## Introduction

The Canadian Chiropractic Association (CCA) is the national association representing more than 9,000 licensed chiropractors across Canada. The CCA advocates on issues that impact the musculoskeletal health of Canadians.

Chiropractors are 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.

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.**<sup>1</sup> 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.

The economic cost of musculoskeletal conditions in Canada is an estimated \$22 billion annually, and it remains a leading reason for short- and long-term disability.<sup>2</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified ongoing healthcare system issues that often prevent Canadians from receiving timely care. Building healthcare system capacity and improving access to primary contact healthcare providers is now more urgent than ever.

Chiropractors are well-positioned to support the government's COVID-19 recovery efforts and to improve the overall quality of healthcare Canadians receive. Doctors of Chiropractic complete a minimum of seven years post-secondary education and complete extensive training and clinical education as part of their studies. They are regulated in all Canadian provinces and because of their extensive training and education are designated to use the title doctor, like physicians, optometrists and dentists. As specialists in non-pharmacological pain management, Doctors of Chiropractic can lead and facilitate an inter-professional, evidence-based, and patient-centred approach to pain care.

This submission contains two recommendations on immediate steps the Government of Canada can take to improve access to primary contact healthcare providers and allow Canadians who are suffering to receive the help they need, when they need it.

**1**

## Recommendation

# Allow chiropractors to assess patients for the Disability Tax Credit Certificate.

Canadians living with disabilities are especially vulnerable during this uncertain time as many are at risk of increased COVID-19 infection rates and serious health complications, as well as loss of income. There is broad consensus among healthcare advocates about the urgent need to provide more support for individuals with a disability. The recently announced proposal to provide a one-time, federal tax-free payment for recipients of the Disability Tax Credit (DTC) is an important step forward to address some of the financial hardships Canadians with disabilities are facing as a result of this unprecedented global health emergency.

Unfortunately, the benefits of this measure cannot be fully realized due to policy barriers that limit the ability of Canadians to access the DTC.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), musculoskeletal conditions are the leading contributor to disability worldwide, with low back pain being the single leading cause of disability globally.<sup>3</sup> A recent Statistics Canada study found that one in three persons with a pain-related disability use chiropractic, physiotherapy or massage therapy treatments.<sup>4</sup> In fact, at least 4.7 million Canadians rely on services offered by chiropractors every year.<sup>5</sup> A significant portion of these patients are Canadians living with disabilities who require ongoing treatment and management of their musculoskeletal conditions.

Yet, these patients continue to face an unfair obstacle in accessing the DTC they are entitled to because the chiropractors they regularly rely on are not authorized by the federal government to assess patients for the DTC benefit. **This oversight was acknowledged in the December 2018 budget report of the Standing Committee on Finance.** The report recommended that the government amend the *Income Tax Act* to allow chiropractors to assess their patients for the DTC benefit.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, this issue remains unresolved and forces chiropractic patients to visit another healthcare professional who may not be aware of, or familiar with, their history — adding unnecessary, and sometimes costly, steps for patients in need of the benefit. Patients who live with this level of disability in rural areas are at an even greater disadvantage in accessing healthcare providers who are authorized to assess their DTC applications.

Chiropractors **already have the authority to diagnose disability in every province** and are recognized as assessors under many similar provincial programs such as Workers' Compensation and Motor





1

*Recommendation continued*

## **Allow chiropractors to assess patients for the Disability Tax Credit Certificate.**

Vehicle Accident rehabilitation. Working closely with patients over an extended period of time puts chiropractors at an advantage when it comes to recognizing when a chronic musculoskeletal condition has reached the point of disability.

**Amending the Income Tax Act (1985), s. 118.4 (2)** by adding chiropractors to the list of practitioners eligible to assess disability for the DTC would finally address this oversight in legislation and reduce the burden on eligible patients who need this important benefit. This action will facilitate efforts to support Canadians living with disabilities, including many seniors who need additional support at this unprecedented time. This simple, cost-effective change has widespread support from the broad patient advocate community, the Canadian Nurses Association, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities and the Arthritis Society, in addition to the Standing Committee on Finance.



## Recommendation

# Support the care of members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) by removing the impediments to timely chiropractic care.

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 for active servicepeople are double that of the general Canadian population.<sup>7</sup> 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.**<sup>8</sup>

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, including during the recent deployments in Ontario and Quebec to provide relief to our frontline workers and support to long-term care homes in the fight against COVID-19.

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.**

Evidence shows that early treatment of acute musculoskeletal conditions has a higher efficacy and better outcomes for patients and helps to avoid the onset of debilitating chronic conditions.<sup>9</sup> From defending our country abroad to supporting us at home during times of crisis, we must ensure that members of our armed forces receive the care they need and deserve in a timely fashion.

In comparison, chiropractic care is well integrated into the U.S. 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.<sup>10</sup>

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, more timely and robust access to chiropractic care for CAF members, the requirement for a physician referral to seek treatment from chiropractors should be removed.

## Conclusion

The CCA urges the Government of Canada to immediately implement these recommendations in order to effectively respond to the impacts of COVID-19 and support Canadians suffering from the burden of musculoskeletal pain and disease. The first recommendation, authorizing chiropractors to assess their patients for the DTC benefit, can support government efforts to support Canadians living with disabilities and will finally correct an oversight recognized by the Standing Committee on Finance that has long created a barrier for individuals living with disabilities. The second recommendation, eliminating the physician referral requirement for CAF members to receive chiropractic services, can facilitate better care for service members experiencing musculoskeletal issues and prevent delays in receiving essential treatment. Our military service members played a major role in Canada's response to the pandemic and deserve improved access to care. These small but powerful changes can mitigate some of the challenges raised by the COVID-19 pandemic, permanently streamline access to care for two vulnerable populations, and contribute to a healthier future for Canada by providing Canadians with the help they need – when they need it.



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