

Approximately 50% of all Canadians are living with at least one chronic health condition.¹ Many of these patients are receiving team-based primary health care, where they can benefit from accessing a wide range of providers, including physiotherapists, for management and prevention of future health problems.

Role of Physiotherapy in Chronic Disease

Research strongly supports the role of physiotherapists in the prevention, treatment and management of chronic diseases, including hypertension, emphysema, Type 2 diabetes, Parkinson's, arthritis and obesity. Physiotherapy interventions, including exercise prescription, facilitate patient participation in programs that enhance and maintain physical well-being which has a significant impact on quality of life (QOL) and future use of health care services.

Impact on Patient Experience

Physiotherapy interventions for chronic disease prevention and management, including exercise prescription and education, take into account the individual's medical condition and needs.²

Patients report that physiotherapy management of their chronic conditions results in:

- Decreased pain and shortness of breath, or dyspnea.³
- Increased confidence and commitment to exercise, which positively impacts health-related QOL.⁴
- Enhanced social interaction, also improving QOL.²

Impact on Population Health

Exercise is essential in the prevention, management and treatment of chronic diseases.⁵

- Physiotherapy interventions target mobility and improve QOL for individuals with chronic diseases and conditions such as multiple sclerosis, chronic heart failure and lymphedema related to breast cancer.^{6,7,8}
- Physiotherapist-supervised inpatient exercise rehabilitation reduces physical impairment and improves functional ability and exercise capacity in individuals with Type 2 diabetes.⁹
- Physiotherapy programs enhance and maintain physical well-being for those with chronic conditions.²

Impact on Health Care Costs

Chronic disease prevention programs that focus on exercise, education and self-management strategies reduce future use of health care resources.

- Physiotherapy assessment and individualized exercise program strategies with telephone follow-up reduces the number of emergency visits, and hospital emergency and health service utilization.¹⁰
- Physiotherapy management of chronic diseases, such as osteoarthritis, alleviates wait times for physician services by addressing pain and functional issues and reduces the need for more costly surgical interventions.¹¹
- Patient self-management of chronic conditions is an efficient, effective, and sustainable use of health care resources.¹

Summary

There is strong evidence that physiotherapy interventions, including exercise prescription and self-management support, are effective in the prevention and management of chronic conditions.

Key References:

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The value of a health care service is more than its proven cost-effectiveness. Quality of life, access, and continuity of care and integration of services are equally important criteria when looking at the broader concept of value.