What is the low-back pain management initiative?

As clinicians, we have the opportunity within a primary care community setting to streamline the way we manage patients with low-back pain.

A partnership between Calgary Foothills Primary Care Network, community health care professionals from Cochrane, and Alberta Health Services’ (AHS) Strategic Clinical Bone and Joint Network is developing a new model of low-back care management, where patients are referred, assessed, treated and managed by primary care clinicians (family physicians, physiotherapists and chiropractors) in a defined community.

By integrating and sustaining clinical best practices for the overall management of lower back pain, we aim to ensure early clinical triage and provide patients with low-back care management plans.

This new low-back care management launched in Cochrane, Alberta in 2016.

Timely care

Research shows that by providing immediate care and education to the majority of those with back pain, chronic pain can be avoided. Early care and education has also been shown to reduce long waits for unnecessary diagnostic imaging and/or surgical consultation.

As a result, early triage can significantly improve patient outcomes, reduce health care costs and improve access.

Pilot research project

As part of this low-back care management initiative, the AHS Strategic Clinical Bone and Joint Network is conducting a pilot research project for 15 months to evaluate the new model of back care management.

Based on proven and successful outcomes of this community-based initiative, there is an opportunity to strengthen the management model and apply for continued and sustained funding towards expanding the model to other health home community areas of the Calgary Foothills PCN and/or other rural and areas of the province.

Who is this service for?

- Adult patients who have acute low-back pain concerns within three months of its onset;
- Have no pending diagnostic screening;
- Need advice about back care management, or need to find out if they require the help of a specialist.
- The Alberta Health Services research portion focuses on patients who have low-back pain that is within three months of its onset.

*Note: WCB claimants or patients involved in litigation relating to their back pain are NOT eligible to participate.

What is offered?

- Assessment
- Assessment may result in surgical recommendation
- Low-back pain management and care planning (using current and up-to-date best practices)
- Education of the condition
- Administration of standardized screening tools (Keefe, Start Back, Oswestry, CORE Back Tool, EQ-5D, PHQ-9)
- Updated care plan reports shared between primary care health care professionals
- Linking the patient back to their health home and with appropriate and available community resources
- Patient/family coaching
- Referrals for additional supports as required

Who provides the service?

This low-back care management service is provided by a team of primary care network family physicians, community physiotherapists and chiropractors who have advanced practice in the assessment and management of low-back pain.

This group was established through an open call for interested clinicians, and a multidisciplinary team of Cochrane-based clinicians were educated through the AHS Strategic Clinical Bone and Joint Network.

The overarching goal of the team is to provide low-back pain management best practices to the community, including coordination of education, referral, and linkages back to the patient’s designated health home.
Referrals
Referrals are accepted by:
• Patient can self-refer by calling one of the clinics involved (see side bar, at right)
• Family physician
• Cochrane Urgent Care
• Fax, phone or letter from community health care provider

What can my patient expect?
• Patients will receive a physical examination performed by a low-back pain assessor.
• The physical exam may last anywhere between 30 – 60 minutes.
• A care plan, recommendation, and possible follow-up will be discussed.
• Assessment and follow-up reports will be faxed to the patient’s primary care family physician.
• If participating in the research component, patients are invited to attend the appointment 30 - 15 min prior, to complete several questionnaires.
• Patients participating in the research component will be contacted to participate in a post-session questionnaire after 12 weeks and again after 6 months.

How will I be informed of the care my patient receives?
Updates will be sent to the patient’s family physician at the assessor’s discretion. During the assessment phase we might access previous diagnostic and other medical consultations. Additionally, the assessors will consult directly with physicians when needed.

When a low-back care team member contacts me, can I bill for this time?
Yes, this is considered a consultation. Codes can be found:
https://www.albertadoctors.org/services/physicians/compensation-billing/billing-help/online/consultations

Calgary physicians with Cochrane-based patients
The services offered by the low-back care initiative are designed for patients and families who live in Cochrane and/or who are attached to a Cochrane Calgary Foothills PCN physician. Patients who are attached to Calgary physicians, but who live in Cochrane and wish to receive this service are also eligible to participate.

Can my patient choose their preferred health care provider?
If a patient would like to be part of the low-back pain initiative, they have the option to choose from a list of health care providers who are participating in the project (listed in sidebar, at right). Official partnerships with these assessors’ clinics have been established with Calgary Foothills PCN, and they have received advanced training through the Strategic Bone and Joint Network.

Patients who have difficulties with health care coverage
• When seen by a physiotherapist or chiropractor, the cost will be covered by the patient’s extended health benefits.
• When seen by a physician, the assessment is covered through Alberta Health Benefits. (Depending on the recommendation there may be a cost involved for follow-up care.)

For patients who have no extended ...
...health benefits and are unable to pay for the service, AHS provides support to low-income patients for community physiotherapy for limited number of visits. Patients can apply through [http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/service.aspx?id=1001414](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/service.aspx?id=1001414)

**Other coverage options:**
- Patients can apply for extra coverage through Alberta Works Income Support.
- Patients can apply for extra coverage for individuals who are receiving AISH.

In these cases, patient will require:
- Medical documentation from a physician stating that the therapy is essential for the management of the patient’s stated medical condition, or that other alternatives have been tried and proven unsuccessful.
- A treatment plan outlining the expected duration, fees for service (2 quotes) proposed outcomes/benefits of treatment.
- These programs also require that all other avenues of funding (ie. low-income, employer benefits, etc.) have been exhausted.

**Who do I consult for orthopaedic surgery recommendations?**

There are currently no formal specialist linkages through the low-back care initiative. The PCN continues to work on establishing a formal connection to specialty services.

**Other recommended resources**
- **Prescription to Get Active** from a family physician. Patients can redeem the prescription at a partner recreation facility for a trial membership and possible reduced rates. [http://prescriptiontogetactive.com](http://prescriptiontogetactive.com)
- Participating Cochrane facility is Spray Lakes Sawmills Family Sports Centre
- **What to Do with Low Back Pain; Get Back At It!** (3 min): [www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkPv7209ums](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkPv7209ums)
- **Choosing Wisely**: [http://www.choosingwiselycanada.org](http://www.choosingwiselycanada.org)
- **Towards Optimize Practice**: [http://www.topalbertadoctors.org/cpgs/?sid=65&cpg_cats=90](http://www.topalbertadoctors.org/cpgs/?sid=65&cpg_cats=90)
- **Alberta Healthy Living**: [https://cfpcn.ca/workshops/alberta-healthy-living-program/](https://cfpcn.ca/workshops/alberta-healthy-living-program/)
- **www.cfpcn.ca**: Chronic Pain Management
- **AHS Chronic Pain Centre**: [http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/services/Page10887.aspx](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/services/Page10887.aspx) (general information, patient education, referral and support.)

**CONTACT**

To ask questions or to provide feedback about the low-back care management service, please contact:

**Sandra Robertshaw**  
Calgary Foothills PCN Health Home Community Program Navigator

**Phone**: 587 794-4661  
**Fax**: 403-284-9518  
**Sandra.Robertshaw@cfpcn.ca**