



THE FUTURE OF WELLNESS

How Chiropractic Care is Helping Improve
the Lives of Veterans

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Foundation for
Chiropractic Progress



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Nearly 20%¹ of Americans suffer from chronic pain, including 65% of Veterans.²

As many of these brave former military members know, chronic pain limits mobility, interferes with the body's proper functioning, affects mental health and self-esteem and has even been shown to shorten life expectancy.³ Chronic pain is one of the top reasons people visit a healthcare provider, which may lead to potentially harmful, ineffective and expensive medications and/or surgical procedures.

There is, however, a drug-free, non-invasive approach to managing pain and improving mobility that is becoming more popular among Veterans and non-Veterans alike: chiropractic care. Chiropractic care is a holistic healthcare profession that focuses on conditions of the spine, muscles and nervous system, or "neuro-musculoskeletal" system, and also addresses the effects these conditions have on patients' general health.

Chiropractic care is a 125-year-old, evidence-based practice, recognized and licensed as a healthcare profession in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and in many other countries, including Portugal, South Africa, Malaysia, Ireland, Canada, Mexico, Great Britain, Switzerland, Australia, Philippines and Japan.



Care is delivered by a doctor of chiropractic (DC), who is a healthcare professional focused on the diagnosis and treatment of neuro-musculoskeletal disorders. Like most other healthcare providers, DCs undergo extensive education and training. For example, they must earn a DC degree, which typically takes four years, pass a National Board of Chiropractic Examiners' exam and be awarded a license in the state in which they practice.

DCs focus on the spine and other joints of the body and their connection to the nervous system to restore proper function of the body, reduce pain, increase movement and enhance wellness. Nearly half of all adults in the U.S. have seen a DC, as well as tens of thousands of Veterans.

Today, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) continues to expand access to chiropractic care at VA healthcare facilities due to the increasing demand from former military members. At the same time, more health plans continue to expand coverage to non-Veterans for chiropractic care as more patients and providers are recognizing the dangers of opioids and other pharmaceutical painkillers and are seeking drug-free and effective pain management options.

**CHIROPRACTIC
CARE IS ON
THE RISE AND
IS MAKING A
DIFFERENCE –
ESPECIALLY
WITH
VETERANS**



While the number of chiropractic care patients has steadily grown over recent decades, recent growth among Veterans has been extraordinary, likely in large part due to the addition of chiropractic care services in VA facilities in [1999](#).⁴ Between 2004 and 2015, the annual number of patients seen in VA chiropractic clinics rose from 4,052 to 37,349, an increase of **821%**. Meanwhile, the annual number of chiropractic visits went up from 20,072 to 159,366, which is a **693%** increase.

The VA and other government agencies are increasingly recognizing how chiropractic care is a safe, drug-free way for Veterans to manage their pain, who suffer from the condition at much higher rates than the general public.



VA Secretary Robert Wilkie wrote in 2018 about his department's "Opioid Safety Initiative," which resulted in a **45% reduction in Veterans receiving opioids** from July 2012 to June 2018.⁶ A part of the program is exploring drug-free pain management methods that focus on improving function among Veterans, Wilkie writes, including chiropractic care, that "may reduce reliance on opioids without increasing pain or causing other health problems."

Access to chiropractic care was given a further boost in 2018 with the Consolidated Appropriations [Act](#) which expanded the availability of chiropractic services into VA hospitals. **Why now?** VA facilities serve more than 5.7 million patients annually and more than half experience chronic pain – with musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) [cited](#) as the number one source of the pain – specifically lower back pain (LBP).⁷





The more studies VA and other military health officials perform about managing chronic pain in Veterans, it appears that a chiropractic care path should be pursued earlier and more often.

This was verified again in 2019 when the results of three clinical trials, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Defense and conducted from 2011 to 2018, concluded **chiropractic care improved fitness** measures among active duty service members with LBP. The trials found that after just eight chiropractic visits over a four-week period, the active service members receiving chiropractic care demonstrated a **5%** increase in isometric strength, compared to a **6%** decrease by the non-care control group.⁸ Balance increased **28%** in the chiropractic group, compared to no change in the control group. Endurance increased **14%** in the chiropractic group, compared to a **10%** decrease in the control group.

“We want to keep this force going,” said Sherry McAllister, DC, president, Foundation for Chiropractic Progress. “For our Veterans’ sake, we hope chiropractic care will be available in far more than half of VA medical centers by the end of 2021. The evidence-based, collaborative and non-pharmacological care doctors of chiropractic deliver is needed now more than ever.”

CHIROPRACTIC CARE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN DECREASING OPIOID USE AND ABUSE

As VA Secretary Wilkie wrote about in his article about his department's Opioid Safety Initiative, the U.S. opioid crisis demands that we find cost-effective and low-risk, drug-free treatments for pain management. MSDs are the second leading cause of disability worldwide – followed by LBP – which is reported to affect **20%** of adults in the U.S. and for active service members and is the most commonly reported condition that interrupts combat duty.⁹ In addition, LBP costs the U.S. billions of dollars every year in healthcare spending – including the additional costs resulting from lost workplace productivity.¹⁰





Since the primary therapeutic procedure used by DCs is the chiropractic adjustment (also known as spinal manipulative therapy) – DCs provide a conservative, non-invasive and opioid-free treatment option for pain – particularly in Veterans with musculoskeletal conditions like LBP. Because chiropractic adjustments are so effective, **research has shown that the percentage of Veterans receiving opioid prescriptions was lower in those who had also received chiropractic care.**¹¹

In addition, Veterans with mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder appear to have better outcomes when drug-free services like chiropractic care and even yoga, massage and acupuncture are integrated with other healthcare services.¹²




**THE FUTURE OF
HEALTHCARE
DELIVERY MUST
BE INTEGRATED,
COORDINATED
AND
PATIENT-FOCUSED.**



While patients with conditions such as chronic pain are more likely to also suffer with **depression and anxiety** – these coexisting issues are particularly prevalent in Veterans. This is why it is vital that chiropractic care is not delivered in isolation from other services within the VA.

Healthcare officials at the VA are developing such an integrated way of caring for Veterans, which is called the Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT). A PACT includes primary care providers, mental health professionals and DCs and may include other clinicians such as social workers, dietitians, pharmacists and other specialists. These PACTs work together within the VA, frequently communicating and collaborating with each other to create and improve care plans for their patients that involve all three therapeutic areas.¹³



“In the past, chiropractic has been isolated from mainstream healthcare, but today, integration is becoming more common and these PACTs are a reflection of that evolution,” said Dr. Bill Morgan, president of Parker University. “The key is to integrate without being assimilated. I have done it, and I know others can do it, too. Having worked in large medical institutions such as Walter Reed Army Medical Center while maintaining a drug-free wellness chiropractic model, patients are hungry for drug-free, surgery-free healthcare solutions. Doctors of chiropractic need to move from isolation to integration, while avoiding assimilation.”

HONORING SERVICE THROUGH BETTER CARE

Healthcare is changing – from high-deductible health plans to telehealth and even medical devices and wearables, the impetus is now on patients to not just receive care, but work hand-in-hand with providers to manage their care, prioritize their own wellness and work toward their health goals.



DCS HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN THIS NEW HEALTHCARE LANDSCAPE THAT EMBRACES FINDING AND CORRECTING THE ROOT CAUSE OF DISEASE RATHER THAN TREATING SYMPTOMS ALONE.

This has been the focus of chiropractic care throughout its 125-year history and continues to be more widely embraced by Veterans and non-Veterans alike each year. In that time, DCs have been integral to helping patients build and sustain their well-being through not only adjustments, but also promoting good health and prevention through education, coaching and encouraging good choices.

Veterans have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country – therefore it is essential that all healthcare practitioners reward that sacrifice by helping them heal and feel vital and healthy once again.

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