



NEWS / PROFESSION

Chiropractic in Alberta: A Model of Consumer Utilization and Satisfaction

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While residents of all 13 Canadian provinces/territories enjoy the benefits of national health care, the *Canada Health Act* stipulates that the federal government provide only "medically necessary hospital and physician services on a prepaid basis." Currently, only three provinces - Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba - provide chiropractic coverage, and only partial, at that. However, if a recent survey commissioned by the Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) is any indication, Alberta's chiropractic utilization and satisfaction rates are reason to ensure access to chiropractic services not only throughout Canada, but worldwide as well.



The stated mission of the HQCA is "listening and responding to Albertans to continuously improve the quality and safety of Alberta's health system." The organization has commissioned three surveys (2003, 2004 and 2006) to determine Albertans' perception of and experiences with provincial health care services, including satisfaction with those services. For the latest survey,¹ data were gathered by way of 4,780 telephone interviews conducted between Jan. 3 and March 7, 2006. Standing out from the wealth of information presented in the 307-page report are several impressive statistics regarding chiropractic care, including the percentage of Albertans who visited a chiropractor in the previous 12 months and the percentage who said they were satisfied with the care they received.

Utilization of Chiropractic Care

According to the 2006 report, 20% of Albertans received chiropractic services in the previous 12 months. The World Federation of Chiropractic's December 2006 *Quarterly Report* states that this figure is "understood to be the highest utilization rate reported anywhere internationally in a public survey." By way of comparison, the most recent CAM utilization study (2005) by Dr. David Eisenberg, et al.,² estimated that 7.4% of the U.S. population visited a chiropractor at least once in 2002, while a 2007 study by Drs. Dana Lawrence and William Meeker (look for an article on this comprehensive literature review in an upcoming issue of *DC*) suggests anywhere from 6% to 12% of the population utilizes chiropractic overall.³

Satisfaction With and Access to Chiropractic Care



Perhaps more impressive than the percentage of Albertans who visited a chiropractor in 2006 is the fact that 90 percent of those surveyed were satisfied with the chiropractic care they received. Only pharmacist services received a higher satisfaction rating (94%), while family doctors (84%), specialists (80%), hospital care (74%), physical therapy (74%) and emergency department services (53%) all rated somewhat to substantially lower. In fact, 67% of chiropractic patients were "very satisfied" and a mere 3% were "dissatisfied" with their chiropractic experience.

Another encouraging statistic from the survey: Ninety-five percent of respondents judged access to chiropractic services to be "easy," based on their experiences. Only access to pharmacist services was deemed as easy (also 95%). Access to hospital care (76%), physiotherapy (74%), family doctor services (74%), specialists (55%) and emergency department services (52%) all proved more challenging, according to those surveyed.

Emphasizing the Doctor-Patient Relationship

A final statistic of note from the 2006 survey concerns what patients value in their health care experiences. Of the factors associated with Albertans' satisfaction with health care services, three have long been espoused by the chiropractic profession: short amount of time from booking the appointment to actually seeing the doctor; the doctor spending enough time with the patient during the appointment; and the doctor listening carefully to the patient's health care concerns.

To read the executive summary, survey highlights or the entire report from the HQCA, visit www.hqca.ca.

References

1. *Satisfaction With Health Care Services: A Survey of Albertans 2006*. Health Quality Council of Alberta, Sep/Oct 2006.
2. Tindle HA, Davis RB, Phillips RS, Eisenberg DM. Trends in use of complementary and alternative medicine by U.S. adults: 1997-2002. *Altern Ther Health Med*, Jan/Feb 2005;11(1):42-9.
3. Lawrence DJ, Meeker WC. Chiropractic and CAM utilization: a descriptive review. *Chiropr Osteopat*, 2007;15(2).

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