

Title: Co-designing community linkages for equity-oriented chronic pain care: participatory planning with stakeholders

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Introduction: Chronic pain impacts 1 in 5 Canadian adults, with demonstrated inequities in the prevalence, severity, and barriers to care. Cross-sectoral linkages between health systems and communities can add to the care continuum by addressing wider concerns, such as social determinants of health. This research aimed to collaboratively identify stakeholder needs and priorities around community linkages in the context of a pain self-management program at a multidisciplinary rehabilitation center.

Methods: This work applied a participatory approach, using a deliberative dialogue methodology. Through active, iterative input, key stakeholders (individuals living with pain, healthcare professionals, researchers; n=7) engaged in a series of 2-hour online workshops guided by a public health planning model. Audio recordings were transcribed, analyzed iteratively, and mapped to the planning model, biopsychosocial model of pain, and social determinants of health.

Results: Stakeholders defined an end goal for individuals living with pain to stay active physically, mentally, and socially. Factors influencing this goal were categorized as predisposing (e.g., knowledge of resources), reinforcing (e.g., the influence of peers, caregivers, health professionals), and enabling (e.g., accessible delivery, cost, language, timing). Linkage strategies to target these factors were proposed across a continuum of complexity (e.g., information, navigation, collaboration, integration of services). Community assets were identified across social determinants of health, including resources for breaking isolation and engaging in meaningful activities, managing stress related to financial stability and food security, and exercising within capacity.

Conclusions: Health systems require strategies to better connect individuals with chronic pain to resources in the community to help them stay active physically, mentally, and socially. Through participatory planning, stakeholders emphasized the need to create easy pathways to help individuals learn about, access, and engage with resources that are low-cost, accessible, adapted to their needs, at critical moments in their care. Leveraging the strengths of the community through tailored linkages can support equity-oriented care that reflects the multidimensional experience of living with chronic pain.

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