

# THE CHIROPRACTIC PROFESSION

## Key Facts & Figures

Chiropractic is a health care profession that focuses on disorders of the musculoskeletal system and the nervous system, and the effects of these disorders on general health. These disorders include, but are not limited to: back pain, neck pain, pain in the joints of the arms or legs, and headaches.

Doctors of chiropractic (DCs) practice a conservative approach to health care that includes patient examination, diagnosis and treatment. DCs have broad diagnostic skills and are also trained to recommend therapeutic and rehabilitative exercises, as well as to provide nutritional, dietary and lifestyle counseling.

**70,000**  
CHIROPRACTORS

There are more than 70,000 doctors of chiropractic (DCs) in the United States who are required to

pass a series of four national board exams<sup>1</sup> and be state licensed.<sup>2</sup> Roughly another 3,000 DCs work in academic and management roles.



**35 MILLION**  
AMERICANS

It is estimated that Doctors of Chiropractic (DCs) treat about 35 million Americans annually.<sup>6</sup>

  
**10,000**  
STUDENTS

There are approximately 10,000 chiropractic students<sup>3</sup> in 18 nationally accredited, chiropractic doctoral graduate education programs<sup>4</sup> across the United States.



**4,200**  
HOURS

Doctors of chiropractic are educated in nationally accredited, four-year doctoral graduate school programs<sup>7</sup> through

a curriculum that includes a minimum of 4,200 hours of classroom, laboratory and clinical internship,<sup>8</sup> with the average DC program equivalent in classroom hours to allopathic (MD) and osteopathic (DO) medical schools.<sup>9</sup>



**2,500**  
CHIROPRACTORS

2,500 doctors of chiropractic enter the workforce every year.<sup>5</sup>

An estimated 40,000 chiropractic assistants (CAs)<sup>10</sup> are in clinical<sup>11</sup> and business management roles for chiropractic practices across the United States.

**40,000**  
ASSISTANTS



### PHYSICIAN-LEVEL PROVIDERS

DCs are designated as physician-level providers in the vast majority of states and the federal Medicare program. Essential services provided by DCs are also available in federal health delivery systems, including those administered by Medicaid, the U.S. Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense, Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, Federal Workers' Compensation, and all state workers' compensation programs.<sup>12</sup>

# PATIENT SATISFACTION & CLINICAL EFFECTIVENESS

The essential services provided by chiropractors represent a primary care approach for the prevention, diagnosis and conservative management of back pain and spinal disorders that can often enable patients to reduce or avoid the need for riskier treatments such as prescription opioid pain medications and surgery.

- In 2017, the American College of Physicians released updated low back pain guidelines that recommend first using non-drug approaches to pain management including spinal manipulation, a centerpiece of chiropractic care, before resorting to over-the-counter and prescription pain medications.<sup>12</sup>

- Similarly, a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 2017 supports the use of spinal manipulative therapy as a first line of treatment for acute low back pain.<sup>13</sup>

- In 2015, the Joint Commission, the organization that accredits more than 20,000 healthcare systems in the U.S. (including every major hospital), recognized the value of non-drug approaches by adding chiropractic to its pain management standard.<sup>14</sup>

- Three in four people who saw a chiropractor in the past year (77%) described chiropractic care as “very effective.”<sup>6</sup>

- A clinical comparative trial conducted at three military medical centers found that chiropractic care combined with usual medical care for low back pain provides greater pain relief and a greater reduction in disability than medical care alone.<sup>15</sup>

**77%**

of chiropractic users describe it as “very effective”



**CHIROPRACTIC CARE COSTS LESS -20%**

In one study involving 85,000 Blue Cross Blue Shield beneficiaries, care for low back pain initiated by a chiropractor **saved 20%** on health care costs compared with care initiated by a medical doctor.

Source: Lilleshall et al (2019), JPT

To learn more about the benefits of chiropractic care, visit [acatoday.org/patients](http://acatoday.org/patients).

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- In another comparative-effectiveness trial, 94% of manual-thrust manipulation (chiropractic) recipients experienced a 30% reduction in their pain, compared with only 54% of medical care recipients.<sup>16</sup>

- Chiropractors are the highest consumer-rated healthcare practitioners for low back pain treatments above physical therapists (PTs), specialist physicians/MDs (i.e., neurosurgeons, neurologists, orthopaedic surgeons), and primary care physicians/MDs (i.e., family or internal medicine).<sup>17</sup>

- Chiropractic’s collaborative, whole person-centered approach reflects the changing realities of health care delivery, and fits well into Accountable Care Organization (ACO) and patient-centered medical home (PCMH) models.<sup>18</sup>

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