



Setting the Record Straight: Chronic Pain is a Disease

Cancer. Diabetes. Heart disease. Alzheimer's. HIV. Most people would naturally associate all of these words with life threatening, debilitating diseases. There are countless others and, among them, one that may not be naturally labeled as a disease state: chronic pain.

Typically defined as pain that persists or progresses over a long period of time ranging in intensity from mild, to moderate, to severe, The [American Chronic Pain Association](#) has a simpler definition for chronic pain: pain that continues when it should not¹. There is a common thread among these diseases: something is happening within a person's body when it shouldn't.

One in five Canadian adults suffer from chronic pain². This means one in five Canadian adults suffer from some, if not all, of the debilitating and life threatening symptoms patients with chronic pain report, including but not limited to: decreased mobility, increased stress, impaired immune function, poor appetite and nutrition, disturbed sleep, isolation from society, overdependence on family or caregivers, and anxiety. And, most alarming: people living with chronic pain have double the risk of suicide as compared to people without chronic pain³.

According to the [Canadian Pain Society](#), pain is the most common reason for seeking healthcare in Canada, and it is associated with the worst quality of life as compared with other chronic diseases such as chronic lung or heart disease⁴. The Canadian Pain Society estimates the annual cost of chronic pain in Canada is at least \$56-60 billion, which is more than cancer, heart disease and HIV combined⁵.

In 2015, the [Canadian Institutes of Health Research](#), Canada's funding agency for health research, recognized pain as a disease for the first time in Canada by awarding the [Chronic Pain Network](#) with government funding through their Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research ([SPOR](#)) initiative* to direct new research in chronic pain, train researchers and clinicians, and translate findings into knowledge and policy. This is a step in the right direction.

Pain is not always curable, but there are treatment options and it's vital that patients who are appropriately selected and monitored are not limited in their access to medications. Chronic pain patients have the right to have their pain treated; to all the best possible technology in pain management; and to live with the least amount of pain possible. Just like any other patient suffering from a debilitating disease.

*Purdue Pharma (Canada) also provided funding to this initiative.

January 2018

¹ American Chronic Pain Association. [Glossary](#)

² Canadian Pain Society. [Pain in Canada Fact Sheet](#)

³ Canadian Pain Society. [Pain in Canada Fact Sheet](#)

⁴ Canadian Pain Society. [Pain in Canada Fact Sheet](#)

⁵ Pain Resource Centre. [Pain in Canada Fact Sheet](#)