



Bone & Joint Health

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Key Partners

[Alberta Bone and Joint Health Institute \(ABJHI\)](#)

[McCaig Institute for Bone and Joint Health](#)

Major milestones and achievements, 2023-2024

A significant proportion of the Alberta population has experienced or lives with a musculoskeletal (MSK) health problem, and more than 3 million Albertans have visited their primary care provider to seek help for MSK-related concerns¹. Effective management of MSK conditions requires early, accurate assessment and appropriate treatment, which is often non-surgical. However, many Albertans experience significant challenges accessing the right care at the right time, leading to negative impacts on quality of life and overall health outcomes. The Bone and Joint Health (BJH) Strategic Clinical Network (SCN) has been driving transformation of the MSK health care system in Alberta, with the goal of improving access to MSK assessment and care—for the benefit of patients across the province and healthcare providers working across the system. Progress over the past year is highlighted below.

Rapid Access Clinics – Implementation of a new model to improve access to and quality of MSK care

Rapid Access Clinics (RACs) are a key component of Alberta's [MSK Transformation Program](#). These specialized clinics offer an access point for patients with MSK conditions. RACs employ a multidisciplinary team model, enabling expert assessment of MSK problems and appropriate referrals and recommendations for needed care. They focus on getting patients assessed quickly and on the right treatment path. Benefits include:

- faster access for patients to receive their initial consult
- efficient, high-quality referrals to surgeons, as appropriate
- earlier initiation of conservative management interventions
- better communication among clinicians and across clinics

Implementation of RACs began in late 2023, with the first cohort of RACs opening their doors in Edmonton, Grande Prairie, and Lethbridge. Work is ongoing to further spread the RAC model of care, with evaluation of the implementation process and effectiveness of the RAC model undertaken in collaboration with the Alberta Bone and Joint Health Institute (ABJHI).

ARMS UP Study – Bringing shoulder assessment closer to home for rural Albertans

Funded through a CIHR Transforming Health with Integrated Care (THINC) grant and co-led by Drs. Lauren Beaupre and Martin Ferguson-Pell (University of Alberta), ARMS UP aims to test and implement a virtual assessment process for shoulder conditions. The process uses a “hub and spoke” model, applying innovative technologies such as robotics, motion capture, and tele-rehabilitation equipment, and combining it with remote support from specialists to enable virtual shoulder assessments in rural settings (spokes), with close links to the RACs in urban centers (hubs). Its purpose is to improve access to high quality care for rural patients, closer to their homes.

The ARMS UP study enables rigorous evaluation of this virtual approach to care delivery. If results are favourable, this work has potential to further expand the reach of RACs in providing access to high quality MSK care for all Albertans, regardless of where they live. The study involves collaboration between the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, Alberta Health Services, BJH SCN team members, and community-based health care providers and clinics. [Learn more](#)

¹ Source: Alberta Health Physician billing data (FY 2018/19), via ABJHI.

Impact on health, care, quality or performance

The BJH SCN has been focused on ‘**Keeping Albertans Moving**’ through focused areas of work that aim to mitigate, maximize and mend problems associated with bones, joints and the MSK system. The SCN is committed to providing access to high quality MSK care to all Albertans, and aims to empower Albertans to self-manage chronic MSK conditions to optimize quality of life.

Over the past fiscal year, the work of the SCN has positively impacted MSK health and care delivery of MSK services in Alberta by:

- ▶ Developing and provincially standardizing evidence-informed, consensus-based clinical guidelines for shoulder, low back and soft tissue knee conditions
- ▶ Co-sponsoring Health Evidence Reviews focused on non-physician assessment of MSK conditions
- ▶ Improving measurement, evaluation and reporting of key performance indicators for MSK conditions
- ▶ Facilitating adoption of digital health solutions and developing patient education materials with evidence-informed information on how to self-manage chronic MSK conditions
- ▶ Championing and supporting implementation of Rapid Access Clinics to improve access to orthopedic consultation for Albertans with select MSK conditions
- ▶ Improving osteoporosis treatment for patients who experience a hip fracture through provincial implementation of the Fracture Liaison Service (FLS)

Words from the wise – perspectives from our Patient Advisor



“I have been a patient advisor to the BJH SCN for 10 years and been involved in many conservative management research studies bringing a collective patient voice to MSK care system research. Most recently the BJH SCN carried out a comprehensive study of MSK care in Alberta. The findings indicate that we continue to experience a fragmented system built more for providers rather than patients, one that takes us on a long and circuitous system journey filled with barriers, and falls short of helping us live with debilitating MSK diseases. Other than surgery, the system does little to support us as we live with chronic progressive illness. As our revised health care system evolves, I worry that conservative (non-surgical) management of MSK conditions will become even further removed from mainstream initiatives. I implore system leaders to not lose sight and act on what patients have been saying for years: remove barriers to accessing providers with MSK expertise, particularly allied health professionals, and provide resources that enable us to self manage our diseases or symptoms, which significantly contributes to our quality of life”.

Jean Miller, Patient Advisor, PaCER, former nurse, osteoarthritis patient, and qualitative researcher

BONE AND JOINT HEALTH SCN

Publications & Grants		Engagement		Outcomes and Impact
	12 Peer-reviewed Publications		19 Workshops & Presentations	2,000+ patients seen at three new Rapid Access Clinics (Jan-June 2024)
	\$3.8M Research Grants		142 Research Members	121 patients and healthcare providers interviewed to better understand MSK care in Alberta