



Opioid Crisis

Acupuncture, a non-pharmacological solution in pain management

Between January 2016 and December 2018, more than 11,500 apparent opioid-related deaths have occurred in Canada. In 2018 alone, there were 4,460 deaths, an average of 12 deaths per day, of which 94% were unintentional. This means that, **one life was lost every two hours** related to opioids¹.

In response to this crisis, the Canadian government is calling for intervention measures nationwide to end overdoses². As highlighted by The Joint Commission, which establishes the guidelines for accredited hospitals in the United States, the solution lies in the **inclusion of non-pharmacological approaches** to conventional treatment for pain³. Acupuncture is one of these methods. Since it relieves pain and is beneficial to health, it can make a significant contribution to reducing the frequency of opioid use by patients⁴.

The *Ordre des acupuncteurs du Québec* (OAQ) recognizes the urgency of the issues raised by the opioid crisis and its responsibility to actively promote acupuncture to face them. That is why the OAQ has set up a committee to inform and demonstrate the effectiveness of acupuncture to its various partners.

Evidence drawn from clinical experience and extensive research demonstrates the therapeutic effectiveness of acupuncture in **pain relief, low risks of side effects and the persistent of its benefits**⁵. Already in 1997, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) acknowledged that endorphins and other peptides released via the central and peripheral nervous systems and the induction of change in neuroendocrine functions are implicated in the effectiveness of acupuncture⁶. Since then, the anti-inflammatory, analgesic, relaxing, immune and regenerative effects associated with acupuncture have been in turn recognized⁷.

¹ Special Advisory Committee on the Epidemic of Opioid Overdoses. National report: Apparent opioid-related deaths in Canada (January 2016 to December 2018). Web Based Report. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada; June 2019 <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/datalab/national-surveillance-opioid-mortality.html>

² Health Canada. (2017). Government of Canada Actions on Opioids: 2016 and 2017 Ottawa. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/federal-approach-canada-opioids-crisis.html>

³ The Joint Commission. (2018). New Joint Commission advisory on non-pharmacologic and non-opioid solutions for pain management. Evidence-based, non-opioid treatment options for pain highlighted. https://www.jointcommission.org/new_joint_commission_advisory_on_non-pharmacologic_and_non-opioid_solutions_for_pain_management/

⁴ Davis R.T., Badger G., Valentine K. et al. (2018). Acupuncture for chronic pain in the Vermont Medicaid population: A prospective, pragmatic intervention trial. *Global Advances in Health and Medicine*, 7:1-10. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2164956118769557>

⁵ Weidenhammer W., Streng A., Linde K. et al. (2007). Acupuncture for chronic pain within the research program of 10 German Health Insurance Funds, basic results from an observational study. *Complement Ther Med*, 15(4):238-246. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctim.2006.09.005>

⁶ The National Institute of Health Consensus Statement (1997). Acupuncture. NIH Consensus Statement Online Nov 3-5;15(5): page 19. <https://consensus.nih.gov/1997/1997Acupuncture107pdf.pdf>

⁷ Lund I., Lundeberg T. (2016). Mechanisms of acupuncture. *Acupuncture Relat Ther*, 4(4):26-30. doi 10.1016/j.arthe.2016.12.001. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311505128_Mechanisms_of_Acupuncture

Considering the current state of knowledge, it is clear that **acupuncture effectively responds to the call of government authorities**. It is an innovative, proven, non-pharmacological solution suitable to multimodal treatments that is safe, low-cost and has a positive impact on patients' quality of life (sleep, mood, digestion, etc.).

“Acupuncture is safe and effective for all types of pain: acute, chronic, postoperative and oncological.”

Tick H., Nielsen A., Pelletier K. et al. (2018). Evidence-Based Nonpharmacologic Strategies for Comprehensive Pain Care: The Consortium Pain Task Force White Paper. *Explore (NY)*, 14(3):177-211. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2018.02.001>

There is a wealth of evidence supporting the effectiveness of acupuncture in the treatment of:

- Migraine prophylaxis
- Tension headaches
- Chronic low back pain
- Postoperative pain
- Knee osteoarthritis

McDonald J, Janz S. (2017). *The acupuncture evidence project: A comparative literature review (revised edition)*. Brisbane: Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association Ltd. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321085966_The_Acupuncture_Evidence_Project_A_Comparative_Literature_Review

Based on a meta-analysis of **17,922 patients** the authors concluded:

“Acupuncture was superior to both no acupuncture control and sham acupuncture for the treatment of chronic pain. Significant differences between true and sham acupuncture indicate that acupuncture is more than a placebo. Acupuncture is effective for the treatment of chronic pain and is therefore a reasonable referral option.”

Vickers A.J., Cronin A.M., Maschino A.C. et al. (2012). Acupuncture for chronic pain: individual patient data meta-analysis. *Arch Intern Med.*, 172(19):1444-1453. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/1357513>

The persistence of the effects of the acupuncture treatment for chronic pain was demonstrated by the analysis of 29 randomized controlled trials; **the benefits persist 12 months** after the end of treatment in 90% of cases.

MacPherson H., Vertosick E.A., Foster N.E. et al. (2017). The persistence of the effects of acupuncture after a course of treatment: a meta-analysis of patients with chronic pain. *Pain*, 158(5): 784-793. https://journals.lww.com/pain/Abstract/2017/05000/The_persistence_of_the_effects_of_acupuncture.5.aspx

THE OAQ ACTION PLAN

- Inform healthcare professionals about the evidence of acupuncture and its mechanisms of action;
- Recommend the use of acupuncture as soon as pain occurs;
- Partner with other professional groups to optimize pain management (multimodal and interprofessional);
- Provide the public with accurate and up-to-date information.

In Quebec, acupuncture has been a regulated profession since 1986, and only members of the *Ordre des acupuncteurs* can practice it. Edition 29th of August, 2019