

ISSUE

Women lack access to healthcare, education and support for perimenopause, menopause and postmenopause in Alberta. This represents 24% of the total Albertan population.

PURPOSE

To reduce suffering for women through the perimenopausal/menopausal/postmenopausal stage of life.

RECOMMENDATION

- The Government of Alberta create a strategy and operational plan to support perimenopausal and menopausal women. This strategy must include:
 - access to care with more menopause clinics, virtual care, hormone replacement therapy and mental health support;
 - more health professionals trained to provide menopause care;
 - policy to support inclusive workplaces;
 - education and public awareness to reduce stigma, facilitating open discussions and encouraging women to seek appropriate medical advice and support; as well as, resources for community-based organizations; and
 - funding more research.

RATIONALE

- Women need baseline knowledge to determine preventative care, lifestyle choices and evidence-based treatment options. Women are suffering without basic knowledge that can have a negative impact on their health.
 - The Menopause Foundation of Canada’s report on “The Silence and the Stigma: Menopause in Canada” states:
 - 54% believe the topic is taboo, 46% feel unprepared for this stage of life and four in 10 report feeling alone.
 - 27% report their family physicians proactively discussing menopause.
 - 41% sought medical advice and found 72% of the advice was not or somewhat helpful.
 - 38% felt their symptoms were under treated.
 - Many primary care clinicians have had little experience treating patients.
 - “Surveying the Silence” by The Alberta Women’s Health Foundation reported:
 - only 66% of Albertan women seek perimenopause medical care.
 - 53% of them report treatment delay.
 - 16% of them report effective treatment.
- Women struggle at home and work (Alberta Women’s Health Foundation, 2023).
 - 10% of women will stop working because their symptoms are debilitating.
 - 73% of women experiencing perimenopause and 52% experiencing menopause report it impacting their working life.
 - 80% and 60% of women report that perimenopause and menopause have affected their personal life.
- Access to evidence-based publicly funded menopause care in Alberta is limited for over one million women in this stage of life. There is only:



- one interdisciplinary menopause clinic in Alberta at the Grey Nuns Community Hospital with four family physicians, a medical director and allied healthcare providers. The clinic is only open two full days per week. Details from the clinic are in the attached document written by Dr. Nan Schuurmans, Medical Director. As of November 16, 2023 the wait times are:
 - five to six months for urgent patients.
 - 12 to 18 months for less urgent patients.
- 36 North American Menopause Society Certified Menopause Practitioners in Alberta as of November 16, 2023.
- The menopause clinic at the Lois Hole Hospital for Women has closed.
- Many patients do not seek care because of the long waitlist for publicly funded care.
- “The Silence and the Stigma: Menopause in Canada” and “Surveying the Silence” reports women’s health has been understudied in Canada.

BACKGROUND

- Natural menopause is deemed to have occurred after 12 consecutive months without menstruation for which there is no other obvious physiological or pathological cause and in the absence of clinical intervention (World Health Organization, 2022). It is caused by the loss of ovarian follicular function and a decline in circulating blood oestrogen levels. It can be induced as a consequence of surgical procedures cessation of ovarian function.
- The average age of menopause in Canada is 51.5 (Alberta Women’s Health Foundation, 2023). Perimenopause is the time leading up to menopause and can last four to eight years. 90% of women are menopausal by 55-56, but for 5% it occurs between 40-45.
 - In Alberta, there were 423,140 females between age 40 to 54 and 606,035 over age 55 in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023). Together, this is 24% of the population.
- Menopause can affect physical emotional, mental and social well-being. The symptoms vary from person to person. There are more than 30 symptoms associated with the hormonal change.
- A variety of non-hormonal and hormonal interventions can help alleviate symptoms.
- The Menopause Foundation of Canada (n.d.) has a playbook for creating a menopause inclusive workplace for employers.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- Unmanaged symptoms of menopause are estimated to cost the Canadian economy \$3.5 billion per year including: \$237 million in lost productivity, 540,000 lost days of work and \$3.3 billion in lost income to a reduction in hours and/or pay or leaving the workforce (Menopause Foundation of Canada, 2023).

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ATTACHMENT

Women's Outpatient Clinic Review 2023

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