

Value Proposition for Primary Care

Research shows that a strong primary care system, centred on continuous doctor-patient relationships, leads to the best health outcomes for patients. This can also lead to cost benefits for the health care system.

Primary Health Care Charter

The Primary Health Care Charter was adopted in 2007 with the aim of creating a strong, effective, accessible and sustainable health care system for British Columbians. It sets out principles that define and reflect the work around primary health care in and for BC, including **family physicians as the cornerstone of primary health care**, with patients and families as partners.

Reviewing the Evidence: Benefits of Continuity of Care

Benefits of a **continuous**, or **longitudinal**, doctor-patient relationship have been well documented in the literature. Starfield has discussed the concept, and provided examples of studies that indicate an association between continuity of care and:

- Improved satisfaction
- More appropriate preventative care
- More accurate diagnoses
- Fewer diagnostic tests and prescriptions
- Fewer hospitalization and emergency room visits
- Reduced costs.

The **economic consequences of continuity of care in BC** have been quantified by Hollander et al. Their research shows that **continuity of care, defined as a patient's attachment to a doctor in the context of his or her practice, can reduce health costs over time and across chronic conditions**. They postulate that this is because of the regular and continuous relationship that develops between the doctor and the patient. The doctor is better able to understand the patient's health issues and circumstances. The patient trusts the doctor. This provides the opportunity for the doctor and patient to anticipate and prevent or mitigate future health problems, which can lead to a reduction in both the use of primary care services and hospital days.

Key Considerations

- *Continuity of care can be defined as an ongoing therapeutic relationship between a patient and one or more providers that spans various health care events and results in an accumulated knowledge of the patient and care consistent with the individual's needs*
- *In BC, if all patients' attachment to a primary care practice was increased by an average of 5%, the total hypothetical annual estimated cost avoidance would have been Can\$142 million in the 2010-2011 fiscal year (Hollander et al)*