



The information in this booklet is not intended to replace the advice of a healthcare professional.



Chronic Pain
AUSTRALIA

Chronic pain

Understanding your pain



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Introduction



Chronic Pain Australia is the voice of Australians living with chronic pain. We do this by providing high-quality, user-friendly, research-based information and support that puts people living with chronic pain at the centre of attention. Chronic Pain Australia also works towards de-stigmatising chronic pain. De-stigmatising chronic pain saves lives.

As part of our remit to reflect the voice of Australians living with chronic pain, we regularly survey our community to develop a greater understanding of the experiences and views of people living with chronic pain. We seek feedback on policies that will affect people living with chronic pain, and advise on practical solutions to problems that arise.

We have created this booklet to help people who have recently started their journey with chronic pain. We hope that it will help you understand your pain and how you can utilise healthcare professionals to best help manage your pain and provide you with better quality of life. **While this booklet is predominantly for people who have started their pain journey, we believe it may still be useful to people who have been experiencing chronic pain for some time.**

In order to develop this manual, we have surveyed people living with chronic pain to establish what they wish they had been told at the start of their pain journey, and what sort of information they would tell someone recently diagnosed with chronic pain. We have worked with consumer advocates, medical specialists, and the Chronic Pain Australia board to provide an overview of the different ways various medical professionals may be able to help someone living with chronic pain.

It is important to remember that this is not an exhaustive document, and that people experience pain differently. What works for you may not work for the next person in line at the GP, so the advice in this booklet is necessarily general in nature. We encourage you to talk to your healthcare professionals, using some of the tips in this booklet, to ensure you get the best possible outcome for yourself.

Chronic Pain Australia runs a peer-support online forum where thousands of Australians who live with chronic pain share their experiences and how they manage with their chronic pain. The peer-support forum can be found on the Chronic Pain Australia website – www.chronicpinaustralia.org.au.

We are grateful for the support in developing this manual, and to all of our contributors, **Dr Mark Whitty, Jarrod McMaugh, Fiona Hodson, Dr Coralie Wales, Daniel Ryan and Alexandra Hordern** for their time and expertise.



Understanding chronic pain

WHEN IS PAIN CONSIDERED 'CHRONIC' AND HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM ACUTE PAIN?



Many people think that chronic pain means extreme pain. Although chronic pain can be really severe, "chronic" actually refers to how long the pain lasts rather than how severe it is. Chronic Pain Australia defines chronic pain as pain lasting in the body for longer than three months.

Acute pain is the pain many of us have experienced from time to time. We hurt ourselves (cut, pull, strain), experience pain, then heal and the pain goes away. Chronic pain is not in this category.

Chronic pain doesn't obey the same rules as acute pain. It can be seen as somewhat of a mystery. It can be caused by:

- Ongoing disease states (arthritis, cancer, multiple sclerosis and other conditions)
- A consequence of trauma (surgery, car or work accident, a fall)
- As a result of a minor injury which leaves ongoing pain

The point is that **the longer pain persists, the more complex it becomes.**

WHAT IS PAIN MANAGEMENT?

Many people live with chronic pain 24/7. It is debilitating, exhausting and has an impact on all parts of a person's life. Living like this takes courage and strength and could be referred to as "putting up with" the pain. People living with chronic pain often say the pain is controlling and unpredictable.

Chronic Pain Australia believes that one of the best forms of pain management is through a multidisciplinary approach.

This means that a person living with pain should draw on as many experts as possible to help manage their pain. These experts include general practitioners (GP), nurses, allied health professionals, mental health professionals, pharmacists, and exercise physiologists. A multidisciplinary approach includes taking medication when prescribed by your GP or pain specialist. Importantly, we believe that people should never be demonised for taking medication to assist in the management of pain.

The type of pain you have and whether you have any other health-related conditions will determine who you get referred to for pain management. Whoever you decide to include in your pain management team, remember that this is your body and your pain – you are the only one who really knows what your pain is like and how it is affecting your life.

WHAT IS PERSON-CENTRED CARE?

Chronic Pain Australia views person-centred care as a way of thinking and doing things that sees the people using health services as equal partners in planning, developing and monitoring care to make sure it meets their needs. People and their families are placed at the centre of decisions, and are viewed as experts, working alongside professionals to get the best outcome.

Person-centred care is not about giving people whatever they want or simply providing more detailed information. It is about considering people's wishes, values, family situations, social circumstances and lifestyles; seeing the person as an individual, and working together to develop appropriate solutions. Practitioners who take a person-centred care approach focus on being compassionate, thinking about things from the person's point of view and being respectful. This might be shown through sharing decisions with patients and helping people manage their health, but person-centred care is not just about activities. It is as much about the way professionals and patients think about care and their relationships as the actual services available.

WHY IS PERSON-CENTRED CARE IMPORTANT?

It might seem obvious, but person-centred care is incredibly important to the well-being of people living with chronic pain. One of the most commonly reported frustrations is people living with pain feeling as though their experience and knowledge of their body is being ignored. Person-centred care avoids this ongoing frustration by ensuring that the person is at the centre of their healthcare.

Being empowered to make decisions about their own care, and not simply fit in with the routines and practices of health service providers, allows people to tailor their experience in treating their condition. This does mean that services need to be more flexible in order to meet peoples' needs in a way that suits them.

Chronic Pain Australia believes that person-centred care is the most appropriate way for medical professionals to interact with consumers, and we encourage consumers to seek out medical professionals who focus on person-centred treatment.

For people in pain, person-centred care means the person in pain always has the right to refuse a treatment option that has been presented to them, without having other treatment options withdrawn as a consequence.

Consent is also a major part of person-centred care. Consent is a full and frank discussion about all treatment options, even if these options may not be the best options, or if you do not want to use the option being presented to you.



What our members told us

We asked Chronic Pain Australia members about what they wished someone had told them when they first started their pain journey and what they would tell someone starting their pain journey. Here are some of their responses.

"That I am not a wimp, my pain is real and I deserve relief."

"Testing medication efficacy will take at least 3-6 months. Medications will usually be mixed i.e. more than a single medication to address the chronic pain."

"That your relationship with chronic pain is something fluid, something that you can affect."

"That you will go up and down with your level of pain each day."

"To go easy on myself, it's ok to rest and go slow."

"That management is the goal, not necessarily a cure."

"The connection between stress and perceived intensity of pain, indeed the link with chronic pain and depression, thus the importance of good mental health."

"You will have to be your own advocate... In the past you would never have dreamed of questioning one of these all-knowing doctors, but now you know they can be wrong, or too busy to know the whole story, or they just don't understand you... Tell them. Your health outcomes depend on their decisions! Their prescribed treatment not working for you? Say so, don't push on with side-effects you can't deal with, or medication or methods that simply don't work. If they don't listen and you have other options? Leave. Find someone else who wants to take care of you."

"Be patient, ask lots of questions and don't just accept whatever you are told as the only way forward."

"I wish I'd been told to keep moving. Don't just go to bed and lay down."

"Take it a day as it goes. Some days will be better, others not so much. Ignore things like housework if it's too much. Teach yourself to let it go."

"Be prepared to see a lot of Specialists. Make sure you have a Good GP, someone who listens and who you can talk to. Make sure you are comfortable with your GP as they will be a big part of your life."

"It takes time. So much time, and I'm sorry for that. Be patient with yourself and with others. Reach out for others like yourself, they will help you find your feet in this new world. Help you find realistic expectations of yourself, your friends and family, they can help you make connections to the right people to get you through it. Cry, rage, talk... All reactions are reasonable, just don't keep them locked up to yourself."



General Practitioners



WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A GP?

General Practitioners (GP) are often the first point of contact for someone, of any age, who feels sick or has a health concern. They treat a wide range of medical conditions and health issues.

As the first point of contact for people with a health complaint, your GP will most likely be the person who co-ordinates your treatment plan to help you manage your chronic pain and any associated conditions. Your GP is able to refer you to other specialist healthcare professionals and keep a constant handle on your condition and treatment options.

HOW CAN A GP HELP ME?

Chronic pain is probably one of the more difficult conditions in the community for a GP to treat. **Pain is a very complex interaction of physical and emotional experiences, influenced by individual attitudes and beliefs as well as personal and social factors.** Given the complexity of the condition, the treatment is often not simple. Ideally, various treatments should be tailored to each individual's experience to help manage their condition.

Pain is a very individual experience and the approach to managing chronic pain should also be individual. Your GP can help you in identifying whether you might need to seek advice

and treatment from pain specialists, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, psychologists/counsellors and allied health professionals. Medications are often used to help manage the severity of pain, and your GP will be able to prescribe these for you. There are numerous pain-relieving options available to GPs to prescribe, and a decision will be made on what medication best suits your conditions.

SIDE EFFECT MANAGEMENT

It's very common for medications to give people side effects. Some typical side effects are well known to a specific class of medications. However, how an individual will respond to any type of medication is not known before it is first commenced. Although doctors may warn of certain effects a medication may cause, it still remains unknown and somewhat unpredictable for each patient. To manage significant side effects, the patient and doctor must decide on the best way forward. Options include;

- Monitor for improvement in the side effect at the same dose;
- Reduce the dose or consider ceasing the medication altogether; or
- Add another medication to help manage the side effect.

The last option is generally the least favourable, due to the risk of side effects when starting a new medication. However, it is hoped that with the right combination that a patient's pain experience has improved and any side effects experienced are predictable and tolerable.

HELPING MANAGE THE PAIN

There are some simple things which may be easily forgotten that may help people in pain.



Planning your day in advance and pacing yourself will allow you to take some time out to rest.



Keeping a positive mindset and ensuring good sleep habits will likely reduce the burden of pain. You may need help with techniques to achieve this, so talking to a mental health professional may be a good idea.



Distraction techniques are important. Depending on the severity of the pain, try doing something that will take your attention off the pain.



Taking your medications at the prescribed time and right dose is also very important to ensure they are as effective as they can be. There are aids available for those who may struggle with this.

QUESTIONS I CAN ASK MY GP?

There are a range of questions you can and should ask your GP when you visit them to discuss your chronic pain condition. You should do your research and learn about treatment options that may be available to you, and write down your questions before

you go to your appointment so that you don't forget anything. You should take notes if you think it will help you remember things, and take a support person with you if you feel that you will need help in asking all of your questions.



SOME QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK INCLUDE:

Q: What new treatment options are available that I should try?

Q: The medications are not working, what other options are there for me?

Q: Are there any new medications I should look at to help manage my pain?

Q: Are there any other healthcare professionals you can refer me to in order to help manage my pain?

Q: What side effects are these medications likely to have?

Q: Are you able to co-ordinate a care team?

Q: Can I drive when taking these medications? Will they affect my ability to work?

Q: Are there any government subsidies that I can access, like a mental healthcare plan?

Q: My medications are causing side effects – what should I do?

Q: Are there any other resources or support groups you can refer me to?

Overall, the goal from the GP's perspective is to have the person with chronic pain as independent and functioning as well with their condition as they can, given their circumstances. Remember that if you feel that your GP is not listening, or does not understand your pain, you can change GP and should find one you are comfortable working with to manage your condition.



Pharmacists



WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A PHARMACIST?

A pharmacist is a person who has expertise in medications. They have knowledge of how medications work and advise both doctors and other members of the community on medication dosages, side effects, and how to take them. The role of the pharmacist is to ensure effective use of medicines. This is a clinical role that requires the pharmacist to consider numerous factors, even if someone has used a medication many times before.

HOW CAN A PHARMACIST HELP ME?

Your pharmacist is a key part of your pain management team. They will dispense medications prescribed for you by your GP or other specialist, but can also advise on how different medications may interact with each other, and give you some practical advice on other things that might help you manage your pain.

The 2018 National Pain Survey, conducted by Chronic Pain Australia, provided some important feedback on the nature of pharmacist's interactions with people who are experiencing chronic pain. There were two themes that were particularly strong that happen to be critical to a productive relationship between a person experiencing pain and their pharmacist: **Communication**, and **Privacy**.

As your pharmacist is one of the most important members of your pain management team, it is important that you are comfortable communicating clearly with your pharmacist. Your pharmacist will need to ask you a number of questions, even if you have been taking the medication they are dispensing for a while. This is because knowledge about different medications is constantly changing, and other things you may be doing to manage your pain may impact the medications you have been prescribed. The National Pain Survey showed that people saw pharmacists as an important part of their team, but sometimes feel interrogated by their pharmacist without any seemingly good reason.

If this is the case, know that you can always remind your pharmacist that you are an individual asking for help with your current situation. Saying something like 'how can you help me with my pain right now?' may help bring the conversation back to focus on you and your pain.

SOME PRACTICAL TIPS FROM THE PHARMACIST



- Remember that your pharmacist will need to ask you a range of questions, even if you have been taking the medication they are dispensing for some time. It is important to be patient, but if you feel that your pharmacist is not taking your concerns seriously, or their questioning doesn't have a point, you can remind them that you are there to seek help with your pain.



- There are a range of products that you can get from your pharmacist that can help you manage your pain. These include heat packs, alternative therapies, and support tools.



- Daily pill packs and organisers, such as Webster packs, are also available from your pharmacist.



- Pharmacists can help with advice about how to manage other conditions that may run alongside your pain, including how to stay mobile when in pain.



- If you are ever uncomfortable, you should seek another practitioner; but if the setting is the problem, ask for a change. This is your health, your wellbeing, your pain. Accessing effective treatment shouldn't contribute to the problem.

QUESTIONS I CAN ASK MY PHARMACIST?

As with your GP, there are a number of questions you can ask your pharmacist when you visit them to have scripts filled or to discuss your chronic pain condition. Again, it might be helpful to write down your questions before you go to your appointment so that you don't forget anything. You should take notes if you think it will help you remember things.

The issue of privacy is closely linked to this discussion – sometimes when you seek the help of a pharmacist, you may want to discuss some information that you feel is sensitive, or you want the comfort of a discussion away from other people.

Some pharmacies have private consultation rooms. This is not always obvious, but there are spaces where you and your pharmacist can discuss any topic you'd like to talk about in a room away from other people. This gives you the comfort to mention any information that you feel is relevant, even if it is personal or sensitive. If you are not comfortable speaking about your pain on the floor of the pharmacy, make sure you tell your pharmacist that you would like to discuss your needs in a private area away from other customers. This is a perfectly valid and reasonable request.



SOME QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK INCLUDE:

Q: What side effects are these medications likely to have?

Q: The medications are not working, am I taking them incorrectly?

Q: Will these medications interact with anything else I am taking for pain management or other conditions?

Q: Are there any non-prescription therapies you can recommend for me?

Q: Can I drive when taking these medications? Will they affect my ability to work?

Q: Are there any other resources or support groups you think might be helpful for me?

Q: My medications are causing side effects – what should I do?



In order to effectively manage your chronic pain, you will need a better understanding of pain and the various treatment options available. As mentioned before, Chronic Pain Australia believes in a multidisciplinary approach to managing pain. Along with your GP and pharmacists, allied health professionals can assist greatly in managing your chronic pain.

As with your GP and pharmacist, good communication with your allied health providers is really important for successful treatment. **Your team will assist in helping you achieve your individual goals by developing a pain management plan with you.** This generally includes goal setting, self-management strategies, tailoring and pacing your exercise to include daily activities, developing a flare-up plan, relaxation and sleep strategies. Evidence shows that patients who embrace active self-management strategies and become an active team member achieve much better outcomes in pain and functioning than those who rely on passive strategies alone like medication.

It is important that you work together with your family, friends, and healthcare providers to find and use the most appropriate strategies and management techniques for your pain. Your healthcare provider may ask you many questions in an attempt to know more about you and your pain. Sometimes these questions may seem irrelevant. You can ask your healthcare provider "How does this question help you to help me today?".

Below is a list of medical professionals including allied health professionals explaining how they can work together with you to help you manage your pain.



GENERAL PRACTITIONER (GP)

Your GP is your primary contact, and co-ordinates your support team, providing referrals where necessary. GPs provide person-centred, comprehensive and co-ordinated healthcare to individuals and families in the community, on a continuing basis.



NURSE

Your nurse works with your GP to co-ordinate your care plan. They work to support self-management of pain across a range of disciplines. Your nurse may be your GP's practice nurse or another nurse referred to you.



PHYSIOTHERAPIST

Can provide advice on movement and exercise plan (pacing and goals, reconditioning and flexibility, posture) and ways to relieve pain including using manual treatments to maintain joint and muscle movement as appropriate. They can also help set up a 'flare-up plan'.



CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

Can teach you different ways of thinking about and coping with pain by helping you to manage your low moods and anxiety, develop helpful coping mechanisms, organise better sleep patterns, and learn relaxation and meditation strategies.



OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

Can help you adapt to your environment and show you ways to pace activities of daily living, such as housework and personal care, and provide advice on useful aids or equipment.



DIETITIAN

Your dietitian can help assist you to develop a nutritional plan that's combined with your paced movement and exercise. This will help you increase your activity and reduce weight safely, if required.



PHARMACISTS

Pharmacists can help minimise your medication safety risks by helping you understand pain and how to use your pain medication in a safe and effective way to avoid harms.



COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE (CAM) PRACTITIONERS

CAM refers to forms of healthcare and providers that are used in addition (complementary) or instead of (alternative) traditional medical treatment by some people with chronic pain. CAM can include medical acupuncture; chiropractic medicine; hypnosis; massage therapy; naturopathic medicine; osteopathy; reflexology; and reiki.



Mental health



The question is often asked: are people who are depressed or have a mental illness more likely to get chronic pain?

In fact, what people tell us is that being in chronic pain is depressing. Add stigma and a lack of good pain management options, and people feel hopeless and experience despair. Unfortunately the take home message may be that the “pain is all in your head”. **This is an uninformed opinion.**

If you are diagnosed with a mental illness, having treatment for that may help. If you also live with chronic pain it is important that the treatment provider understands the neuroscience of chronic pain - and you should be as familiar as possible with this understanding of pain as well. A deep understanding of this is necessary to treat chronic pain effectively.

WHAT IF MY PAIN FOLLOWED A TRAUMATIC EVENT?

This is crucial. If you have suffered trauma, you may not respond to pain management options until the trauma has been psychologically assessed and treatment provided. Many people in pain find that pain management treatment doesn't work until the trauma has a treatment focus.

WHAT IS A MENTAL HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL – WHAT DO THEY DO?

The next section looks at the types of professionals active in providing mental health treatment and what they do. Remember that this is a smorgasbord. What works for one person may or may not for another, and no two health professionals are the same. People in pain describe the value of finding a health professional that connects to you, listens to you and this is often the difference between healing or not.



PSYCHOLOGISTS

A psychologist is an allied health professional who specialises in the treatment of mental health problems and human behaviour. Psychologists aim to listen to a patient's problems and assess the situation as to how well the patient is functioning emotionally, mentally and intellectually. They will then determine the root cause of the problem and the emotions and thoughts that the patient is experiencing. The psychologist will then come up with thought processes that the patient can use in order to deal with their problems in a more effective way. These professionals are not medically trained, and cannot prescribe medications.



PSYCHIATRISTS

A psychiatrist is similar to a psychologist in that they are trained in the diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems. However, psychiatrists have undergone medical training, which allows them to prescribe medication beyond just psychotherapy.



PSYCHOTHERAPISTS AND COUNSELLORS

A psychotherapist or counsellor aims to help treat mental health problems without medication. Psychotherapy refers to a range of treatments that can help with mental health problems, emotional challenges, and some psychiatric disorders. It aims to enable patients, or clients, to understand their feelings, and what makes them feel positive, anxious, or depressed.



QUESTIONS TO ASK TREATMENT PROVIDERS

Q: How many people living with chronic pain do you see – and how much do these people improve their chronic pain?

Q: How many sessions will I have? Is this a time limited treatment – or does the therapy continue for many months or years?

Q: What type of therapy do you offer?

Q: How much will it cost?

Q: What happens if I miss a session?

Q: What happens if I want to take a vacation? Will I still have to pay?

Q: Will our sessions together be confidential?

Q: Will you make notes during the session, and if so, what happens to these?

Q: Can I contact you inbetween sessions?

RESOURCES AND MORE INFORMATION

The Chronic Pain Australia website has a number of helpful resources related to mental health, and the role it plays in chronic pain.



- www.chronicpinaustralia.org.au/chronic-pain/treatments/psychology
- www.chronicpinaustralia.org.au/chronic-pain/pain-physiology
- www.chronicpinaustralia.org.au/chronic-pain/role-of-trauma



Exercise Physiologists



Exercise is medicine and an important strategy used to assist in the management of pain conditions.

The right exercise can help those with chronic pain gradually engage more in activities of enjoyment and daily living. Significant research has shown that exercise is essential in the treatment of chronic pain as it is effective in reversing the downward cycle of deconditioning or worsening pain. As well as the physical benefits, exercise has the added advantage of improving mental wellbeing and quality of life, while reducing **your risk factors for other chronic conditions.**

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF AN EXERCISE PHYSIOLOGIST?

An Exercise Physiologist is the expert in exercise and can guide you through an exercise program to manage pain. As an allied health professional, their education and training provide a thorough understanding of anatomy and physiology, so they understand the mechanisms of pain.

HOW CAN AN EXERCISE PHYSIOLOGIST HELP ME?

An Exercise Physiologist will use exercise to manage pain by:

- Strengthening and mobilising joints
- Correcting movement patterns
- Improving the sequence of activation through each kinetic chain.

They will help you find the right type and intensity of exercise to minimise the exacerbation of symptoms and gradually build your exercise tolerance, which is often difficult to achieve independently.

To reduce the risk of developing comorbidities such as Hypertension, Type 2 Diabetes or Coronary Artery Disease, it's crucial to stay physically active. Understandably, those with chronic pain are at increased risk as the nature of pain often leads to avoidance of physical activity, despite evidence which shows it to be highly beneficial.

Seeking the help of an Exercise Physiologist is recommended if you are unsure what exercise you should be doing or if you are concerned about exercise increasing your symptoms. Everyone experiences pain in a different way. Look for a practitioner who prescribes highly individualised programs that consider your goals and lifestyle, and who is able to tweak the program based on how your body responds. As well as an expert exercise prescription, an Exercise Physiologist is there to support you and answer your questions, so it's important to find a practitioner you 'click with'. Look for an Exercise Physiologist that will work holistically, communicating with other doctors and health professionals about medications or other treatments you may be using, so that you're getting the most out of your health team.

Most Exercise Physiologists offer supervised sessions and home exercise programs, so regardless of your budget they can help you get moving. Exercise Physiology services are eligible for private health rebates or you may be able to receive Medicare rebates under an Enhanced Primary Care Plan; speak to your GP to find out if you're eligible. If you want to know more about using exercise as medicine to treat and manage chronic pain, getting back into physical activity and doing the things you love to do, find your local Exercise Physiologist via essa.org.au/find-aep.



Frequently asked questions



HOW DO I ACCESS A GP MANAGEMENT PLAN?

Chronic pain patients can be complex and may have other health-related conditions that make them eligible under the Commonwealth Medical Benefits Scheme (MBS) and allow for certain allied health professional consultations to be considered for a GP Management Plan (GPMP) - MBS item number 721 with Team Care Arrangements (TCA) - MBS item number 723. This service is funded by Medicare and may cover some or all of the consultation costs of up to five visits per year with certain allied health professionals, such as physiotherapists or dietitians and up to ten consultations per year with a psychologist if you have depression and/or anxiety. This encourages follow-up care and gives the GP an opportunity to discuss a longer-term strategy of care that involves communication with other team members where appropriate.



WHAT OTHER SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

Many people living with chronic pain report feeling isolated or not understood by family. Fortunately, modern technology allows people living with pain to communicate easily with like-minded people facing similar issues. Facebook is a great place to start, with plenty of pages dedicated to pain conditions, many with a specialised focus on a particular type or cause of pain. The Chronic Pain Australia Facebook community is active and welcoming, as are the other specific pain groups. It is also worth looking at Health Consumers Associations, as they usually operate in each state. You can find Chronic Pain Australia's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/ChronicPainAustralia. The Chronic Pain Australia website also has a peer support forum you can join.



MY HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL ISN'T LISTENING – WHAT SHOULD I DO?

It is really important that you have a good relationship of trust with the people helping you manage your pain condition. If you are seeing a healthcare professional that you don't feel is listening to you or understanding your pain despite you asking lots of questions and explaining yourself clearly, you should feel free to seek a second opinion. If the professional is someone you were referred to by your GP, speak to your GP and ask for a referral to a different specialist. Most GPs will have a few different specialists they can refer you to. If it is your GP you are having difficulty with, you can try a different GP at the same practice, or another practice. Reaching out to other people living with pain through the Chronic Pain Australia website forums may be a way to get a recommendation on a good doctor in your area.



HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED IN HELPING OTHERS WITH CHRONIC PAIN?

Many people living with chronic pain want to help others with the condition and provide advice for those recently diagnosed with a pain condition and those who have been living with a condition for some time. This is a great thing to do, as you can hear from other people going through a similar situation as your own and hear how they manage their pain and all the ups and downs. Getting involved in online forums is a great way to start, or offering to help out at consumer information sessions (even if it is just ticking names off at the door), or for those with a bit more time available, volunteering with a local support group. If there isn't a support group close to you, you could consider starting one, but you would need to make sure that you had an appropriately qualified professional overseeing the group, in case someone who joins the group needs additional support. It is a good idea to search for local support services so that if someone needs some more professional support, you can assist to connect them.

