



## Information Sheet

PHC is the most common health care experienced by Canadians and improvements are essential. Our goal is to establish new pan-Canadian data sources and information that can be used to understand and improve PHC across Canada, report on PHC indicators and inform health policy and decision-making at various levels.

### Who We Are

Established in 1994, CIHI is an independent, not-for-profit corporation that provides essential information on Canada's health system and the health of Canadians. Funded by federal, provincial and territorial governments, we are guided by a Board of Directors made up of health leaders across the country.

### Our Vision

To help improve Canada's health system and the well-being of Canadians by being a leading source of unbiased, credible and comparable information that will enable health leaders to make better-informed decisions.

# Primary Health Care

## Seniors and the Health Care System: What Is the Impact of Multiple Chronic Conditions?

According to survey data, about three in four Canadian seniors are living with one or more chronic conditions.<sup>1</sup> These conditions cause the majority of deaths in Canada and can dramatically impact a patient's sense of well-being and use of health care resources, particularly for patients with comorbidity (more than one chronic condition). In addition, seniors often take multiple prescription medications for their chronic conditions, increasing their chance of experiencing side effects and exposing them to the risk of medication errors, such as incorrect dosing.

Significant gaps in preventive care and patient-provider collaboration exist in care for seniors with chronic conditions, which could result in preventable complications requiring emergency department visits or hospitalization.

### Key Findings

- The number of chronic conditions, not age, was the more important factor contributing to a senior's level of health care use.
- Seniors with high comorbidity (three or more chronic conditions) reported poorer health, took more prescription medications and had the highest rate of health care visits among seniors with chronic conditions.
- Seniors taking five or more prescription medications had an increased risk of experiencing side effects requiring medical attention compared to seniors taking fewer medications.
- Fewer than half of seniors with chronic conditions reported discussing their treatment goals with their physician or working with their physician to create a treatment plan.

### Impact of Chronic Conditions on Health Care Use

- In each of the senior age groups (65 to 74, 75 to 84, and 85 and older), those with three or more reported chronic conditions had twice the number of health care visits as seniors with no reported chronic conditions.

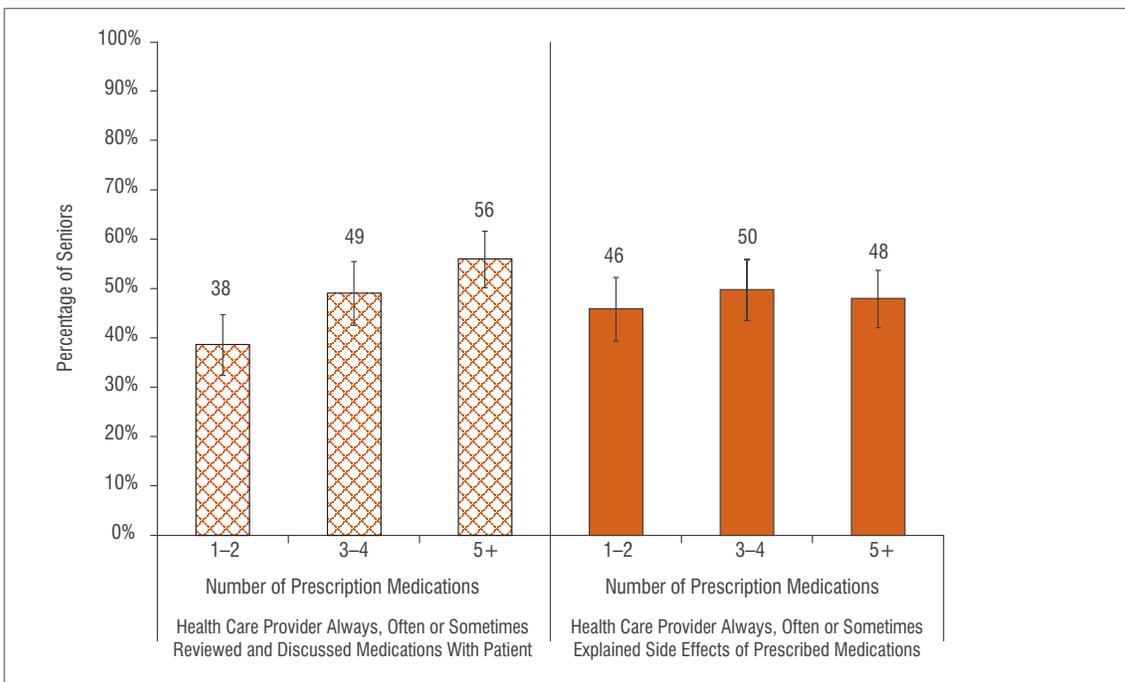
i. This analysis focused primarily on seniors (age 65+) with one or more of the following 11 chronic conditions: arthritis, asthma, cancer, chronic pain, depression, a mood disorder other than depression, diabetes, emphysema or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke.

- Seniors with three or more reported chronic conditions accounted for 40% of reported health care use among seniors, even though they comprised only 24% of all seniors.
- Seniors with no reported chronic conditions were more likely (92%) to report their health status as “good,” “very good” or “excellent” than those with one (86%), two (77%) or three or more (51%) reported chronic conditions.
- Seniors who reported three or more chronic conditions were taking an average of six prescription medications on a routine or ongoing basis; this was twice as many medications as seniors with only one chronic condition.

### Gaps in Medication Management and Patient Safety

- Seniors with chronic conditions taking five or more prescription medications were more likely (13%) to experience a side effect requiring health care than similar seniors taking only one or two prescription medications (6%).
- Fewer than half of seniors with chronic conditions reported having had their medications reviewed by a doctor (48%) and reported having had the side effects of their prescription medications explained to them by a doctor (47%) at least some of the time.
- Of seniors with chronic conditions and who took at least five prescription medications, 56% reported having received medication reviews by their provider at least some of the time in the past 12 months, compared with 38% of similar seniors taking only one or two medications.

Figure 1: Senior Patient–Provider Collaboration in Medication Management, Canada, 2008



**Source**  
Canadian Survey of Experiences With Primary Health Care, 2008, Statistics Canada.

### Looking Ahead

Improvements in managing seniors with chronic conditions can lead to the prevention of complications and comorbidities as well as improved effectiveness and cost-efficiency of health care for seniors. CIHI’s PHC Information program actively collaborates with PHC providers, researchers, health system planners and policy-makers across Canada to address priority data and information needs, such as seniors with multiple chronic conditions.

### Contact Us

For more information, please contact us at [phc@cihi.ca](mailto:phc@cihi.ca).