

# TCMO

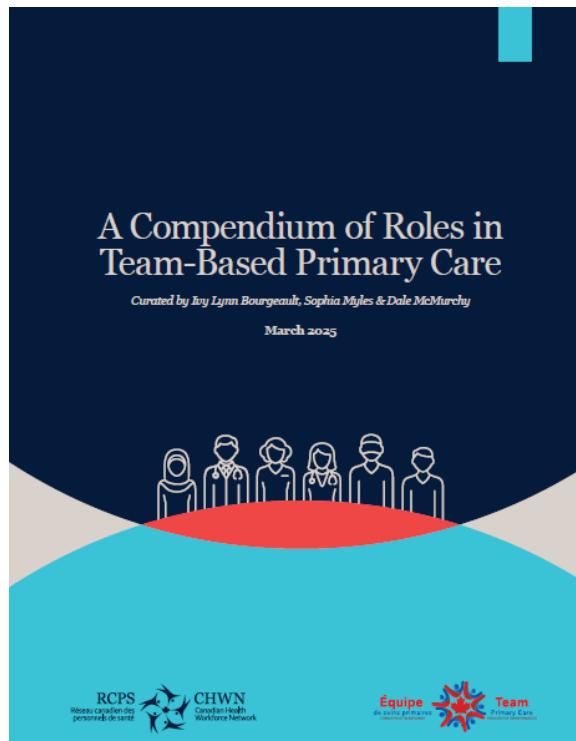
Traditional Chinese Medicine Ontario

Earlier this year, the first edition of *A Compendium of Roles in Team-Based Primary Care* was released. Unfortunately, the initial version overlooked the regulated health professions of Registered Acupuncturist, Registered Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioner and Doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

TCMO worked with other Associations, representing Registered Acupuncturists, Doctors of Acupuncture, Registered Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners, and Doctors of Traditional Chinese Medicine as well as Educational Institutions, across Canada to research, write and edit two entries into the *Compendium*.



The attached entries are focused on the benefits and contributions of our TCM profession in the realm of Primary Health Care in Canada, and have been submitted for inclusion within the upcoming second edition of the *Compendium*.



\*image courtesy  
of RCPC/CHWN

**TCMO: Promoting Acupuncture and TCM Practice in Ontario**  
*Moving the Field of Traditional Chinese Medicine Forward*  
A vibrant and unified profession with one strong voice in the province.  
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More details can be found here:

*The Compendium of Roles in Team-Based Primary Care (TPC) report (link here: <https://www.hhr-rhs.ca/images/PDFs/A%20Compendium%20of%20Roles%20in%20Team-Based%20Primary%20Care%20TPC%20April%202025.pdf>) was a compilation of work done by the Interprofessional Collaborative Table (IPCT) (link here: <https://www.teamprimarycare.ca/ip-collaborative-table>).*

*The IPCT was one of the three Tables established by the Team Primary Care: Training for Transformation Initiative (link here: <https://www.teamprimarycare.ca/>)*

*TPC is an initiative of the Foundation for Advancing Family Medicine, the College of Family Physicians of Canada and the Canadian Health Workforce Network, with funding from the Government of Canada Sectoral Workforce Solutions Program (more info here:*

*[https://ca01.l.antigena.com/l/bUdJ7vWMisZ2KEXeR6I4nac3p0UUKGQPxxK70GzJC9yM-s\\_IqXQJ-dFCK~FqxXQAJvAtbPfIAxwcH2ZZpXy8sIBckbHoXvLyTZKa-qW4wekJgTOuf77MTr5t6y3ghCjooi-Nk5XEGgleVq5A42Qsp2EWutVVb\\_m6HGzc](https://ca01.l.antigena.com/l/bUdJ7vWMisZ2KEXeR6I4nac3p0UUKGQPxxK70GzJC9yM-s_IqXQJ-dFCK~FqxXQAJvAtbPfIAxwcH2ZZpXy8sIBckbHoXvLyTZKa-qW4wekJgTOuf77MTr5t6y3ghCjooi-Nk5XEGgleVq5A42Qsp2EWutVVb_m6HGzc)*

*And the TPC final report can be found here:*

*<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63dab34cdcf44c74c49865d0/t/66841d9df8b1cd7297e5786c/1719934371740/TPC+Project+Overview+-+English.pdf>*

## Acupuncturist, Registered

### ***Patient Vignette:***

Pauline, a 49-year-old woman, had primary concerns of ongoing stress, poor sleep, low energy, irregular menstrual periods, and high blood pressure. She also experienced frequent headaches, digestive discomfort, and emotional strain from balancing work, caregiving for elderly parents, and supporting her college-aged children. Her home life added more stress, with little support from her partner.

As the Registered Acupuncturist (R.Ac.) asked a series of detailed questions, Pauline described waking every night around 3 a.m., often lying awake for hours. Her energy crashed around 3 p.m., worsened by sugar or caffeine. She had a small appetite, felt bloated, and had inconsistent bowel habits. Her periods had become heavy, painful, and unpredictable. She also experienced tension headaches, eye discomfort, and occasional dizziness. Her blood pressure had been elevated at her last doctor's visit.

Her Acupuncturist created a treatment plan based on a full assessment of her physical and emotional health. Weekly acupuncture sessions focused on calming her nervous system, supporting sleep, reducing pain, and managing stress. She was also given easy-to-follow tips on food, hydration, and movement to help regulate energy and blood pressure.

With the patient's consent, the R.Ac. collaborated with her primary care provider, who ordered blood work, including hormone tests, and discussed options for managing blood pressure, including medication. The R.Ac. was also able to collaborate with other members of the primary healthcare team to ensure that Pauline's care could include visits to the massage therapist (RMT), physiotherapist, counselor, and other supports as needed.

After six sessions, Pauline reported better sleep, reduced headaches, improved digestion, and steadier energy levels. Her blood pressure readings began to improve, and she felt more in control of her health. Her periods were still irregular but less intense. She described feeling "more balanced," both physically and emotionally.

### **Introduction:**

A Registered Acupuncturist (R.Ac., Ac. or Dr of Ac.) is a regulated healthcare professional trained in Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), offering holistic, patient-centered care. As a core

member of a collaborative primary care team, an R.Ac. supports whole-person wellness and lasting health outcomes through personalized treatment plans. With thousands of hours of TCM education and continuing education, they

are experts in acupuncture—not as an add-on, but as a central, scientific and evidence-based practice. Using fine, single- use, sterile needles, the R.Ac. stimulates specific body points which are identified by anatomical and physiological standards.

By eliciting a predictable physiological response, the R.Ac. helps regulate systems, ease pain, reduce stress, restore balance, and facilitate healing. Patients seek the care of R.Ac.s for a wide range of reasons, including acute and chronic pain, digestive issues, depression, anxiety, stress, insomnia, fatigue, inflammatory conditions and hormonal concerns. In addition to acupuncture, treatments may include electrostimulation, cupping, moxibustion, photobiomodulation, gua sha, tui na massage, qi gong, and lifestyle and dietary support—always tailored to address both symptoms and root causes.

#### **Education:**

To become a Registered Acupuncturist in Canada, individuals must complete a diploma or degree in Acupuncture or TCM from an approved post-secondary institution. Programs are typically a minimum of three years of full-time study and include comprehensive theoretical and clinical training in TCM theory and diagnosis, acupuncture techniques, biomedicine, safety, and professional ethics. Students must also complete supervised clinical practice with patients. Upon graduation, candidates may have to fulfill additional

provincial requirements in order to join the profession.

#### **Regulation:**

The practice of TCM Acupuncture is regulated in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland & Labrador. In these jurisdictions, registrants must complete a lengthy program of study followed by successful results on jurisprudence and safety exams as well as standardized examinations.

The Canadian Alliance of Regulatory Bodies of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists (CARB-TCMPA) administers standardized Pan-Canadian exams, and works to ensure quality practice and labour mobility across the country. In Quebec, practitioners must complete an exam administered by the Ordre des acupuncteurs du Québec.

Regulation establishes that practitioners must meet consistent educational and clinical standards while protecting the public, safely ensuring that Acupuncture and TCM continue to be recognized as a healthcare system. The push for national regulation continues, aimed at maintaining high standards and equitable

access to safe, qualified acupuncture care across Canada.

#### **Scope of practice, roles and responsibilities:**

R.Ac.s assess, diagnose, and treat patients using TCM principles to promote wellness, prevent illness, and address the root causes of disease. Their practice is patient-centered, collaborative, ethical, and safe.

R.Ac.s can:

- Assess and diagnose using TCM techniques and biomedical knowledge.
- Perform acupuncture, moxibustion, cupping, gua sha, electrostimulation, photobiomodulation, tui na massage, qi gong, and offer lifestyle and dietary advice.
- Determine a TCM diagnosis, identifying body system imbalances.
- Develop personalized treatment plans to promote and restore health and ongoing wellness.
- Apply acupuncture safely and effectively.
- Collaborate effectively with other healthcare providers to ensure patient-centered care.

## Examples of roles and responsibilities specific to three primary care domains

### **Maternal/Newborn/Early Childhood:**

- Non-pharmaceutical management of common pregnancy complaints, such as nausea, hyperemesis gravidarum, muscle, pelvic and sciatic-type pain, insomnia, fatigue, anxiety; as well as more critical maternal health conditions including pre-eclampsia.
- Preparation for labour, cervical ripening, repositioning of a breech baby presentation, labour support.
- Postpartum recovery, including pain, Caesarean-section scar healing, fatigue, depression, and lactation challenges.
- Fertility support in both women and men, and to alleviate cycle and menstrual disorders as well as menopausal concerns and hormonal imbalance in women.
- Non-pharmaceutical management of common childhood ailments, such as colic and digestive issues, sleep disorders, recurrent infections, and allergies.

### **Chronic Care and Pain Management:**

- Holistic, non-pharmaceutical pain relief for acute and chronic conditions, including back, neck, and knee pain, sciatic pain, repetitive strain injuries, fibromyalgia, arthritis, asthma, migraines, and headaches.
- Alleviate complex multi-symptom syndromes including long COVID, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, chronic fatigue and auto-immune disorders.
- Management of side effects of cancer care chemotherapy and radiation therapy, restoring appetite, reducing neuropathic pain, dry mouth, and nausea.

### **Older Adults/Geriatric/End-of-Life:**

- Management of some side effects of medication, including constipation and loss of appetite.
- Support recovery and improve mobility after surgery, including post-surgical pain and nausea.
- Non-pharmaceutical management of insomnia, stress, anxiety, and pain, and improvement of overall quality of life.
- Rehabilitation to improve motor skills, speech, and cognitive recovery following a stroke or other neurological incident.

### **Did you know?**

- TCM-based Acupuncture is recognized by the World Health Organization as treatment for over 40 medical indications and as the most common form of traditional medicine practice.
- The NADA (National Acupuncture Detoxification Association) protocol is a

TCM-based auricular treatment that addresses PTSD and addictions (including smoking cessation). It has been recognized to reduce hypervigilance and anxiety and is used in over 17 countries in mental health and addiction centres.

- Athletes use acupuncture to enhance performance, improve flexibility,

prevent injury and accelerate recovery.

- Clinical studies confirm that regular acupuncture treatments enhance the duration and quality of sleep.
- Acupuncture has been shown to be effective in treating anxiety disorders.
- Studies have shown that acupuncture can reduce symptoms of allergic

- rhinitis (sneezing, congestion, itching) and lower dependence on antihistamines.
- Cost-effectiveness of acupuncture has been observed in the treatment of many pain conditions, migraines, headaches, depression, dysmenorrhea, and post-op nausea and vomiting.
- Acupuncture is routinely used within assisted reproductive settings to support treatments such as in vitro fertilization.

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# Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Doctors, Registered

## *Patient Vignette:*

James, a 78-year-old retired teacher, sought care from a Registered Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioner (R.TCMP, Dr.TCM) for rheumatoid arthritis and chronic venous insufficiency. Ongoing joint pain, stiffness, and swelling in his lower legs made it difficult to walk and enjoy everyday activities in retirement.

At his first visit, the R.TCMP conducted a detailed assessment, asking about his pain, mobility, sleep, energy, digestion, and overall well-being. This helped reveal connections between his symptoms and underlying issues affecting multiple body systems.

His treatment plan included acupuncture to reduce inflammation, relieve joint pain, and support circulation and an herbal formula to address factors contributing to his condition. Mr. Carson had questions: Could he continue his prescriptions? Would he need the formula long-term? Was it made with animal products? Would it taste unpleasant? The R.TCMP explained that while some formulas include animal ingredients, the personalized formula was entirely plant-based, designed to complement his prescription medications, and would be adjusted over time. The taste was new and different, but he adapted quickly, especially as his symptoms began to ease.

In addition to acupuncture and herbal medicine, the R.TCMP provided dietary guidance to reduce inflammation through simple nutrition changes. Daily lifestyle strategies were also introduced to improve sleep, reduce stress, and increase energy, recognizing that these changes could make a meaningful difference in his overall recovery and quality of life.

With his consent, the R.TCMP sent a brief report to his physician, his massage therapist, and physiotherapist, outlining the details of his treatment plan. That transparency helped build trust between providers and ensured coordinated care.

After a few months of care, the swelling in his legs eased, his morning stiffness improved, and he was walking farther with less effort. He began to enjoy retirement once again, because his healthcare team was working together to support him, not just treat him.

## **Introduction:**

Registered Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners (R.TCMP.s, Dr. TCMs) are regulated health professionals who deliver care using the full scope of

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Treatments may include acupuncture, cupping, moxibustion, tui na massage, gua sha, electrostimulation, photobiomodulation, dietary

therapy, lifestyle counselling, and most distinctively, Chinese herbal medicine.

All TCM practitioners, including Registered Acupuncturists (R.Ac.s), use pattern differentiation, a

diagnostic method developed over thousands of years that considers symptoms in relation to the patient's constitution, emotional state, lifestyle, and environment. R.TCMP.s and Dr.TCMs are uniquely qualified to diagnose and treat using Chinese herbal medicine as a standalone therapeutic system. This enables them to address complex, multisystemic conditions, both acute and chronic.

Incorporating TCM into team-based primary care offers meaningful benefits. R.TCMP.s and Dr.TCMs complement the allopathic system by bringing a whole-person lens, individualized care plans, and a focus on prevention, regulation, and long-term resilience. For many Canadians, R.TCMP.s and Dr.TCMs serve as trusted primary care providers, delivering care that bridges traditional knowledge with evidence-informed, clinically grounded practice.

### **Education:**

To become a Registered Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioner (R.TCMP.) or Doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Canada (Dr.TCM), individuals must complete a diploma or degree from an approved post-secondary institution. Programs require a minimum

of four years of full-time study for R.TCMP. and five years for Dr.TCM (in British Columbia), and provide comprehensive training in TCM theory & diagnosis, acupuncture techniques, Chinese herbal medicine, biomedical sciences, safety, ethics, and drug interactions with pharmaceuticals.

A central focus is in-depth study of Chinese herbal medicine as a complete and clinically-applied therapeutic system. Students learn to develop individualized, evidence-informed treatment plans. Clinical education includes supervised internships treating patients under qualified instructors.

For R.TCMP., graduates must pass the Pan-Canadian Entry-Level Examination and fulfill additional provincial requirements, including jurisprudence and safety exams, to qualify for registration in regulated jurisdictions.

BC has more rigorous Dr.TCM examinations and requirements.

### **Regulation:**

The regulation of acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has steadily expanded across Canada. British Columbia first regulated acupuncture in 1996, and by 2000, fully

recognized TCM under the Health Professions Act; it also allows the Registered Doctor of TCM title, Dr.TCM, which has additional requirements for training and examinations than R.TCMP.

In Ontario, the Traditional Chinese Medicine Act was passed in 2006, enabling regulation of the profession and is now working toward the establishment of the Doctor of TCM title.

These two provinces require practitioners to pass Pan-Canadian exams, administered by the Canadian Alliance of Regulatory Bodies of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists (CARB-TCMPA) as well as jurisprudence and safety training.

Currently, only BC and Ontario regulate Chinese herbal medicine in addition to acupuncture, while Alberta, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland & Labrador, only regulate acupuncture.

In Alberta, practitioners are able to use the protected title of "Doctor of Acupuncture", however Chinese herbal medicine is not regulated.

## **Scope of practice, roles and responsibilities:**

R.TCMP.s and Dr.TCMs are authorized to formulate and dispense custom herbal prescriptions based on individual pattern differentiation. Their scope of practice includes the full application of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), which involves assessment, TCM-based diagnosis, treatment planning, and the use of multiple modalities including acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, tui na massage, cupping, moxibustion, gua sha, electrostimulation,

photobiomodulation and dietary and lifestyle counselling rooted in TCM principles.

R.TCMP.s and Dr.TCMs can:

- Assess and diagnose using TCM techniques and biomedical knowledge.
- Perform acupuncture, moxibustion, cupping, gua sha, electrostimulation, photobiomodulation, tui na, qi gong, and offer lifestyle and dietary advice.
- Prescribe, dispense and formulate custom Chinese herbal preparations.
- Determine a TCM diagnosis, identifying body system imbalances.
- Develop personalized treatment plans to promote and restore health and ongoing wellness.
- Apply acupuncture safely and effectively.
- Collaborate effectively with other healthcare providers to ensure patient-centered care.

## **Examples of roles and responsibilities specific to three primary care domains**

### **Maternal / Newborn / Early Childhood**

- Support for menstrual regulation, ovulation, and fertility, preparation for conception and assisted reproductive treatments such as in vitro fertilization.
- Treatment of common pregnancy-related concerns, such as nausea, insomnia, fatigue, constipation, and emotional dysregulation as well as more critical maternal health conditions such as hyperemesis gravidarum, uterine bleeding, and gestational hypertension.
- Preparation for labour, cervical ripening, repositioning of a breech baby presentation, labour support.
- Postpartum care, including lactation support, uterine recovery, sleep, and mood stabilization.
- Paediatric support for digestive concerns, immune resilience, and mild developmental imbalances.

### **Chronic Care and Pain Management**

- Management of chronic multisystemic conditions such as autoimmune diseases, long COVID, chronic fatigue, neurological conditions, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), and hormonal disorders.
- Pain management, diagnosis and treatment of circulatory and inflammatory patterns.
- Emotional health support for conditions such as anxiety, sleep disturbances, and stress-related disorders that contribute to and aggravate chronic symptoms and illnesses.
- Complementary care to reduce the side effects of conventional medications and support organ resilience in long-term care plans.

### **Older Adults / Geriatric / End-of-Life**

- Treatment of insomnia, poor appetite, constipation, arthritis, and fatigue.

- Support for cognitive decline, memory issues, and frailty through TCM-based strategies to support weak constitutions.
- Collaborative end-of-life care focused on pain reduction, emotional peace, and digestive comfort.
- Guidance on seasonal diet, movement, and self-care for healthy aging and disease prevention.

### Did you know?

- Traditional Chinese Medicine is one of the oldest continuously practised medical systems in the world and is now used by millions of Canadians seeking support for both acute and chronic conditions.
- R.TCMP.s and Dr.TCMs are uniquely trained to offer herbal medicine as a core therapy.
- Studies show that TCM can improve outcomes in areas like chronic pain, digestive health, fertility, menopause, and mental-emotional well-being.
- Studies show TCM can reduce withdrawal symptoms and cravings, which is a valuable complement to addiction recovery.
- Many patients choose R.TCMps and Dr.TCMs as their first point of contact for care, especially when navigating complex or unresolved health concerns.
- TCM has particular relevance in culturally safe care, especially for East Asian, newcomer,

and multicultural populations seeking alignment with traditional healing practices.

- TCM-based care includes diet and nutritional recommendations alongside movement and lifestyle supports.
- R.TCMP.s and Dr.TCMs are increasingly integrated into team-based care models across Canada, contributing to person-centred, non-pharmacological, and preventative approaches in community health settings.

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Complementary Therapies in Medicine.

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