

What is primary care and why is it important?

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Primary care is the front door to the health system. It's a place any patient should be able to turn to whether they have a new health concern or a chronic health condition like diabetes or asthma that needs ongoing care.

It's the entryway to other parts of the system, coordinating referrals to specialists. It helps people stay well by providing health advice and vaccinations to prevent illness, or organizing tests that catch disease early. It takes care of all parts of a person, physically and mentally, and puts each person's care needs in the context of their life, family and community.

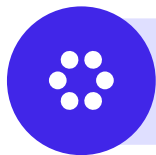
According to the World Health Organization, there are 5 core features of primary care:¹

The 5 C's of Primary Care

Primary care is a model of care that supports the overall health and well-being of a population and ensures that everyone has equal access to health services. There are five core features of primary care, according to the World Health Organization:



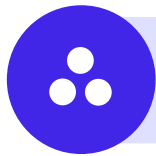
First Contact creates a strategic entry point for and improves access to health services.



Continuity promotes the development of long-term personal relationships between a person and health professional or a team of providers.



Comprehensiveness ensures that a diverse range of promotive, protective, preventive, curative, rehabilitative, and palliative services are provided.



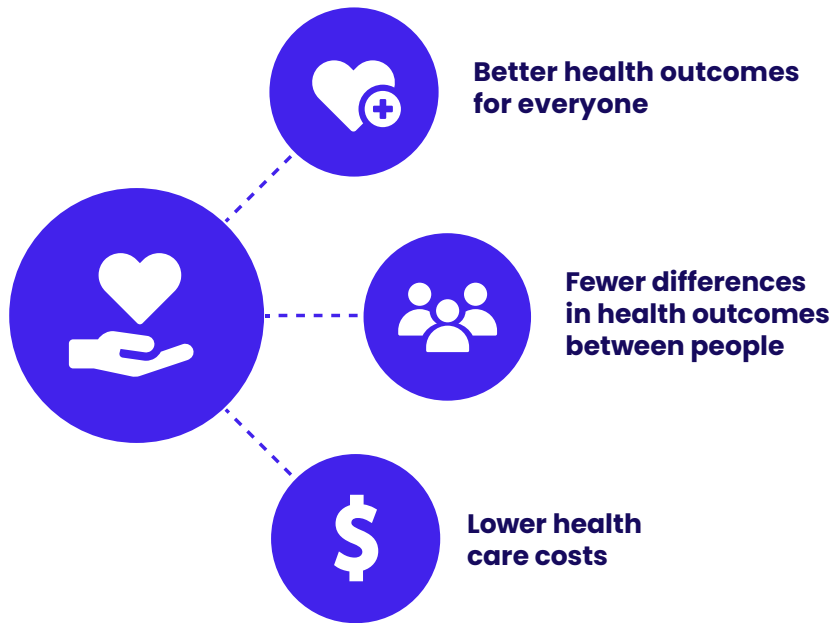
Coordination organizes services and care across levels of the health system and over time.



People-Centred care ensures that people have the education and support needed to make decisions and participate in their own care.

Why is primary care important?

A large body of research has shown that countries with a strong primary care system have healthier populations, fewer differences in health between people (better equity), and lower health care costs.²



Dozens of studies have also found that having an ongoing relationship with one clinician who you see again and again over time – continuity in the relationship between an individual and doctor – has many benefits, including:

- ✓ Better health
- ✓ Decreased use of the health care system
- ✓ Lower health care costs
- ✓ Lower death rates³



¹The World Health Organization's definition of primary care can be accessed at <https://www.who.int/teams/integrated-health-services/clinical-services-and-systems/primary-care>

²Barbara Starfield et. al. 2005. "Contributions of Primary Care to Health Systems and Health," The Millbank Quarterly, 2005 Sep; 83(3): 457–502. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2690145/>

³Evidence Summary: The Benefits of Relational Continuity in Primary Care, 2017. <https://actt.albertadoctors.org/media/yueffrua/top-evidence-summary-value-of-continuity.pdf>

Over 16 months, OurCare heard from almost 10,000 people across Canada about their hopes and priorities for a better primary care system. Visit OurCare.ca to learn more.