

Origins and History of Chiropractic

The word 'chiropractic' comes from the Greek words *cheir* (meaning 'hand') and *praktos* (meaning 'done'), i.e., done by hand. Manual healing methods can be traced back to ancient times; however, it was not until the late 19th century that the chiropractic profession in the United States began to take shape.

Daniel David Palmer is widely credited with giving the first chiropractic adjustment in 1895. He also established the first chiropractic school in 1897 in Davenport, Iowa. From that point forward, Palmer and others continued to refine chiropractic manual adjusting techniques as well as study how manual manipulation can relieve pain and improve function. While spinal manipulation continues to be a centerpiece of chiropractic care, modern chiropractors have developed a variety of practice styles, featuring different therapies and modalities, to address patients' needs. They practice a holistic approach to health care that generally excludes drugs or surgery.¹

As the new profession was getting on its feet in the early 20th century, chiropractors began organizing into professional societies. These groups launched efforts to standardize education and support research.² Today, there are almost 20 **chiropractic colleges** in the United States accredited by the Council on Chiropractic Education, which was officially recognized in 1974 by the U.S. Department of Education as the accrediting agency for chiropractic schools. In 1996, the U.S. government began funding chiropractic research through the National Institutes for Health and over the years the profession has received millions in federal funding for scientific research thanks to robust research programs at several of the colleges.

Chiropractic is a regulated healthcare profession in the United States and has been for more than 100 years. Before being **granted a license** to practice, doctors of chiropractic (DCs) must meet stringent educational and competency standards set forth by the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners and individual states. Kansas was the first state to license chiropractic in 1913. Today, all 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, all U.S. territories, and **more than 40 countries worldwide** license chiropractors.

With an increasing body of research supporting its approach, the chiropractic profession has over time become integrated into many healthcare systems, hospitals, and public and private health and managed care plans. Spinal manipulation was first included in Medicare in 1972 (**efforts continue** to expand the services that chiropractors can provide to Medicare beneficiaries), and two years later in 1974 chiropractic care became a benefit in the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program. Chiropractic is also a benefit in most state workers' compensation programs.

Nondrug pain relief has been especially important to active-duty members of the military as well as veterans, many of whom experience chronic musculoskeletal pain as a result of their service. Congress passed legislation in 1993 to include chiropractic in the U.S. Department of Defense healthcare system. Today Chiropractic services are available to active-duty personnel at more than 60 military bases in the United States, Germany and Japan.

Legislation to include chiropractic in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare system was passed in 1999. Chiropractic is now available at 70 major VA medical facilities in the United States. In addition, in 2014 the VA launched a chiropractic residency program—the first of its kind in the country—where chiropractors train alongside their medical counterparts at VA medical systems around the country. The residency is a full-time one-year program in integrated clinical practice emphasizing the delivery of chiropractic care in hospitals and other integrated healthcare settings.

In recent years, the **epidemic of opioid overuse** has prompted many respected health organizations to recommend the use of nondrug approaches for pain relief as a first line of defense, potentially helping patients to reduce or avoid the need for prescription pain medications. Notably, the American College of Physicians (ACP) updated its guideline for the treatment of acute and chronic low back pain in 2017 to recommend first using noninvasive, nondrug treatments—including spinal manipulation—before resorting to drug therapies. A host of other organizations have since endorsed ACP's guideline or issued similar recommendations.

The chiropractic profession continues to grow and evolve. There are more than 70,000 chiropractors licensed today in the United States—practicing in solo practices, multidisciplinary clinics and major hospital systems. It is estimated that more than **35 million people** visit a chiropractor each year.

ACA celebrated our 50-year anniversary in 2013 (PDF).

1. National Board of Chiropractic Examiners. "Practice Analysis of Chiropractic 2020." www.nbce.org. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://mynbce.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Practice-Analysis-of-Chiropractic-2020-5.pdf>

2. Hug, Reginald. "50 Years of Accomplishment: The American Chiropractic Association Celebrates Its 50ths Anniversary in 2013." *ACA News*, January/February 2013, pp. 20-23. Accessed April 30, 2021. ACA_50th_anni.pdf

and accomplished chiropractors, who understand that it takes more to be called an ACA chiropractor.

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