

PRESS STATEMENT

Dr. Peter Topham

Wednesday, 13 March 2024

Chronic Kidney Disease Integrated Care Pathway

Thank-you Minister Wilson and good afternoon.

It is my pleasure to share with you the key findings and recommendations that are the result of the collective work of the Chronic Kidney Disease Integrated Care Pathway Working Group and stakeholder feedback.

Chronic Kidney Disease impacts a growing number of Bermuda residents and, as Minister Wilson noted, is placing a disproportionate and unsustainable burden on the Island's overall health system. Following the extensive literature review and stakeholder engagement work, it is clear that a comprehensive approach to early identification and prevention of chronic kidney disease is required. For these are the key drivers to both enhancing patients' quality of life and reducing costs across Bermuda's system.

In addition to the high prevalence and high costs of chronic kidney disease, our study also identified significant financial, cultural, and information barriers to accessing care related to chronic kidney disease. For universal health coverage to be fully realised, these barriers to accessing care must be addressed as a matter of priority.

More specifically, chronic kidney disease requires ongoing medical care, including regular consultations, diagnostic testing, and medications, all of which can be costly, especially for our un- or under-insured patients. The inability to cover the cost of care may deter people from seeking out the care they require.

There are also some members of our community who may have personal, cultural or spiritual beliefs that discourage seeking out appropriate care, or who rely on other approaches to healing until their health condition worsens.

For most people chronic kidney disease is not associated with any specific symptoms and this can lead to both delayed diagnosis and to initiation of treatment at a more advanced stage of disease when it is less likely to be effective. The lack of easily accessible health literature can prevent residents from understanding the symptoms, risks, available healthcare resources, treatment options, and the self-management strategies for the prevention and effective management of chronic kidney disease.

Five main challenges for the provision of care for chronic kidney disease are highlighted in the final report.

1. The lack of prevention strategies and a structured screening programme for chronic kidney disease in Bermuda results in delayed diagnosis and missed opportunities for prevention.
2. Health providers have identified public knowledge and awareness of chronic kidney disease as low, which can hinder prevention, diagnosis, and effective management of the disease.
3. The lack of adequate coordination and communication between health providers, including primary care physicians, specialists, and support services, negatively impacts the ability to provide seamless care delivery and the achievement of optimal health outcomes for patients with chronic kidney disease in Bermuda.
4. The high cost and ongoing need for care when experiencing chronic kidney disease, combined with cultural barriers such as the reluctance to seek out health services and inadequate education about chronic kidney disease prevention and treatment, create barriers for residents in accessing the necessary health services related to this disease.
5. Bermuda currently does not have a comprehensive policy around organ donation. The low level of organ donations and absence of comprehensive transplant facilities on-island creates obstacles to providing timely and accessible organ transplant services. As a result, treatment options are limited for individuals who are in the end stages of chronic kidney disease.

Importantly, our work has identified 17 opportunities for improving the delivery of care and overall health outcomes for residents with chronic kidney disease. Not surprisingly, the opportunities for improvement focus on:

- Enhancing prevention and early detection,
- Improving education and awareness of chronic kidney disease,
- Improving the coordination of care and communication between health service providers for stronger patient support,
- Enhancing access to, and the affordability of care, and
- Enabling more organ donations and transplants.

Of the 17 recommendations, I would like to highlight the following four:

1. To address the issue of delayed diagnosis and treatment, it is recommended that targeted prevention and screening programmes are developed to identify people experiencing chronic kidney disease at an earlier stage, where the course of the disease can be altered.
2. To address the problem of financial, cultural, and informational barriers to both accessing care and receiving the necessary treatment to prevent the progression of the disease to end-stage kidney disease, it is recommended that a thorough assessment be completed to identify the greatest barriers to care and a multi-disciplinary task force be created to develop effective solutions for those barriers.
3. Given the limited availability of organs for transplantation in Bermuda, promoting organ donation through targeted campaigns could significantly increase the number of kidneys available, thus significantly reducing the wait time and limited access to life-saving transplants.
4. Promoting achievable lifestyle modifications is key in the moderation of the progression of chronic kidney disease. It is essential for primary care providers to promote achievable lifestyle modifications in Bermuda that are tailored to the local context and individual needs and also take other conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension, and periodontal disease. Within this, it would be remiss of me not to mention the healthy lifestyle choices that we can all adopt as part of the prevention strategy for chronic kidney disease:
 - Adopting healthy eating habits and choosing foods, such as fruits and vegetables and whole grains, while moderating your intake of overly processed foods;
 - Drinking plenty of water, which is essential for kidney function;
 - Incorporating regular exercise into your weekly routine. Being active for 30 minutes a day can go a long way in improving or maintaining your overall health; and
 - Getting the sleep your body and mind needs to restore itself and function optimally.

Before I end, I would like to extend my personal thanks to all those involved in this work, particularly those with lived experience of chronic kidney disease and their families. The collective insight, experience, and expertise that we had access to during this process enabled us to develop both the service map and future patient care pathway that now becomes the road map for improving chronic kidney disease care in Bermuda, while addressing the issues of cost and most importantly, optimizing patient health outcomes.

Thank-you.

ABOUT THE BERMUDA HEALTH STRATEGY AND UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE:

The Bermuda Health Strategy 2022 – 2027 (“The Health Strategy”) was developed as the next phase of work for the Ministry of Health as it works to achieve the vision of *“healthy people in healthy communities”*. The Health Strategy provides the frame to shift Bermuda’s health system as it works to implement Universal Health Coverage and shift to a more people-centred approach to healthcare that focuses on delivering better care that meets the needs of individuals and families today and into the future. Bermuda’s Universal Health Coverage programme is a multi-year, multi-phased initiative that seeks to ensure *“all people have equitable access to needed informative, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative essential health services, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that people do not suffer financial hardship when paying for these services and critical medicines.”*

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