

# ECONOMIC AND RESOURCE STATUS OF THE CHIROPRACTIC PROFESSION IN ONTARIO, CANADA: A CHALLENGE OR AN OPPORTUNITY

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Chiropractic is one of the most frequently sought nonphysician provider groups. Despite its apparent recognition, the profession faces numerous challenges, including the economic reality of an increasing supply within a market of questionable demand. This paper evaluates the chiropractic manpower status in Ontario, Canada.

**Methods:** Data collected from administrative and education databases, insurance billing data, and population health survey data between 1990 and 2004 were analyzed.

**Results:** Between 1990 and 2004, the total number of chiropractic registrants in Ontario doubled, with an average annual rate of growth of about 5.4%; however, recent data suggest that the number of nonpracticing chiropractors is increasing, whereas the number of new registrants is decreasing. The rate of applications to a chiropractic institution rose sharply and peaked in 1996-1997, thereafter declining but leveling off in 2002-2003. Despite the continued growth in the number of practicing chiropractors, the utilization of chiropractic services among the Ontario population has remained relatively stable, resulting in a decline in the average net annual incomes adjusted for inflation to 2002 dollars.

**Conclusions:** Our results support previous reports projecting an oversupply of chiropractors and suggest that the chiropractic profession in Ontario is in long-run oversupply. Competition from other providers, changing population demographics, and the recent loss of public funding for services may present significant future challenges to current practitioners. Opportunities related to participation in multidisciplinary environments and accessing unmet population health needs may contribute to influencing the demand for chiropractic services. A concerted effort by professional and educational institutions is required. (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2008;31:104-114)

**Key Indexing Terms:** *Chiropractic; Manpower; Income; Health Resources; Supply and Distribution*

From its humble and unconventional beginning, the chiropractic profession continues to develop according to its interest to best service the needs of the population. This ongoing development occurs despite the external constraints imposed upon it by the state, special interest groups, and the specific health care system in Canada.<sup>1</sup> The profession has obtained self-regulatory status in all Canadian provinces, maintains high patient satisfac-

tion, and is the most frequently sought complementary and alternative health care group.<sup>2</sup> Yet despite this apparent acceptance, its future role within the health care system remains controversial.<sup>3</sup> In addition, chiropractors are beginning to realize the potential economic threat of an increasing supply within a market of questionable demand.<sup>4</sup>

Cooper and McKee<sup>4</sup> recently noted that the chiropractic profession in the United States has experienced little of the rapid growth in market share it encountered in the early 1980s. They questioned how much unmet demand there is for chiropractic services, especially given the increasing numbers of other health care professionals vying for the same market share at a time when coverage for its services is decreasing. Moreover, the practicing chiropractor, impacted by the increases in the number of new graduates,<sup>5</sup> the low barriers to entry for other complementary and alternative health care providers,<sup>6</sup> a dampening of the strength of its once convincing evidence base,<sup>4</sup> and the ongoing divisiveness within the profession,<sup>3,6</sup> is being forced to more aggressively market his/her services and products<sup>4</sup> in a market where the demand for chiropractic services has decreased from an estimated 10% of the US population in 1997 to about 7.5% in 2002, despite an about 13% increase

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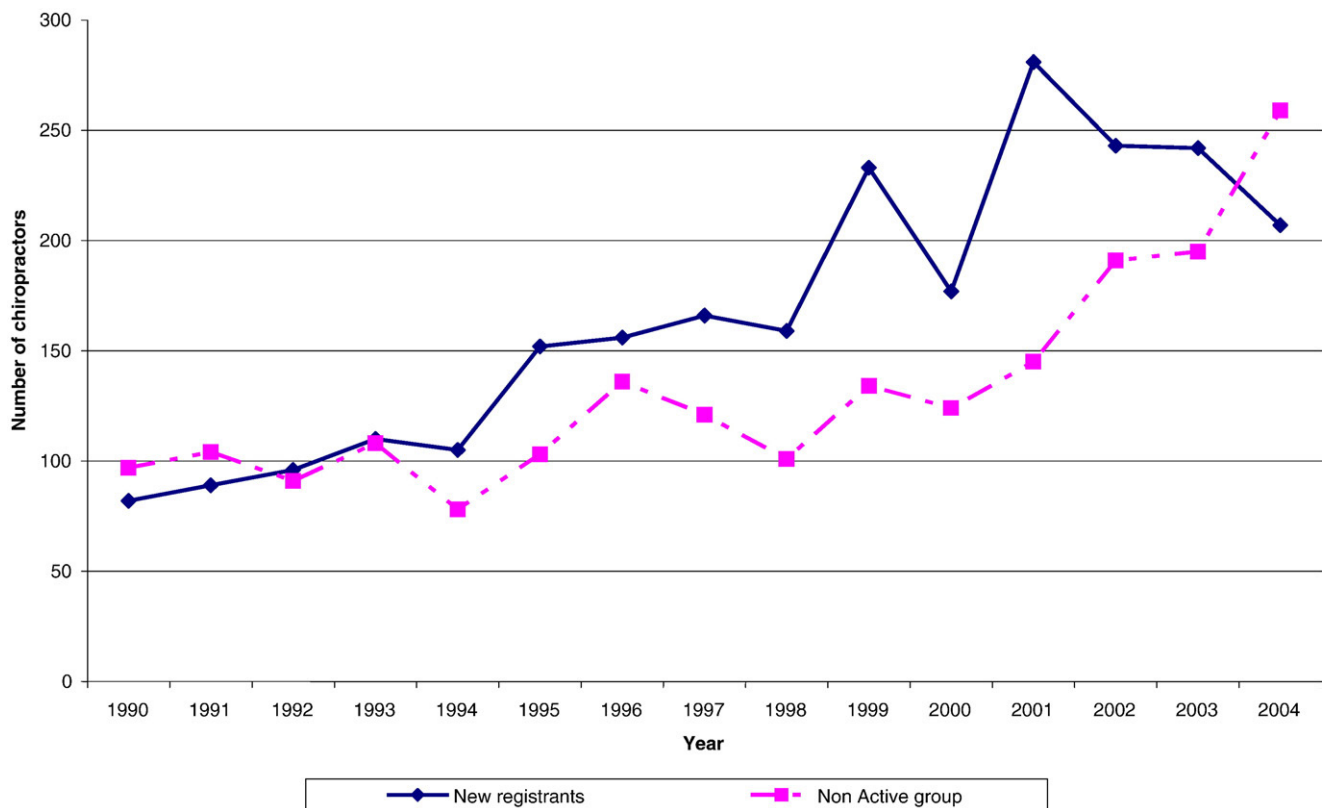
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**Table 1.** Number of chiropractors registered with CCO from 1990 to 2004

Year <sup>a</sup>	Total Registrants	% Change	Active <sup>b</sup>	% Change	New Registrants	% Change	Nonactive <sup>c</sup>	% Change	Retired <sup>d</sup>	Inactive <sup>e</sup>	Suspended <sup>f</sup>
1990	1668		1610		82		97		9	49	39
1991	1716	2.9	1650	2.5	89	8.5	104	7.2	16	50	38
1992	1752	2.1	1696	2.8	96	7.9	91	-15.4	22	34	35
1993	1830	4.4	1764	4.0	110	14.6	108	18.7	15	51	42
1994	1878	2.6	1846	4.6	105	-4.6	78	-27.8	15	17	46
1995	1999	6.4	1946	5.4	152	44.8	103	32.1	12	41	50
1996	2118	6.0	2042	4.9	156	2.6	136	32.0	16	60	60
1997	2243	5.9	2168	6.2	166	6.4	121	-11.0	20	55	46
1998	2372	5.8	2293	5.8	159	-4.2	101	-16.5	25	54	22
1999	2516	6.1	2419	5.5	233	46.5	134	32.7	34	63	37
2000	2667	6.0	2576	6.5	177	-24.0	124	-7.5	31	60	33
2001	2939	10.2	2818	9.4	281	58.8	145	16.9	35	86	24
2002	3103	5.6	2953	4.8	243	-13.5	191	31.7	33	117	41
2003	3302	6.4	3129	6.0	242	-0.4	195	2.1	45	128	22
2004	3456	4.7	3213	2.7	207	-14.5	259	32.8	66	177	16
Average		5.4		5.1		9.2		9.1			

Source: College of Chiropractors of Ontario. March 2005. Used with permission.

- <sup>a</sup> Year ending December 31.
- <sup>b</sup> Those who have paid full registration and assume capable of practicing.
- <sup>c</sup> Assumes numbers not practicing and is the sum of retired, inactive, and suspended categories.
- <sup>d</sup> Those who are not actively practicing but wish to maintain membership in the CCO, hence included as registrant.
- <sup>e</sup> Those who are practicing in Ontario and have moved out of province.
- <sup>f</sup> Those who are no longer registered with the CCO.



**Fig 1.** Number of new registrants compared with nonactive group.

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