

Person-centered care and how you can take your health into your own hands

August 10 2022, by Amanda Aguilar da Nova



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[Person-centered care](#) (also known as patient-centered care) is the philosophy of giving power back to patients and putting them "at the center" of care.

It can lead to [lower health-care spending](#) and [better patient health](#)

[outcomes](#). That's why person-centered care has become a [top priority](#) in Canada.

As a [health](#) services researcher working with an [international group of researchers](#), my goal is to learn more about how person-centered care works and how we can use people's voices and [health information](#) to make it happen.

I'm also a person who uses the health-care system, which is why I know it's important for everyone to know what person-centered care is, where it came from and how each of us play a part in building a better health-care system.

What is person-centered care?

"Putting patients at the center" is a really vague goal. That's why your [family doctor](#), pharmacist, physiotherapist and everyone in between probably has different ideas about how to be person-centered. Here are [three signs that the care you're getting is person-centered](#):

1. **They see you as a whole person:** You are unique and complex. You have wants, needs, friends and families. That's why your health-care provider wants to hear what you have to say and respects your right to make choices about your own body.
2. **They treat you like a partner:** Rather than tell you what to do, your health-care provider listens, teaches, and partners with you to build a care plan that aligns with your goals. Like any partnership, trust is key. You trust them, and they trust you.
3. **They help you navigate your journey to better health:** They listen to your concerns and validate your feelings. They also give helpful advice using words you understand and point you to other resources when you need them.

Where did this idea come from?

A hundred years ago in the western medical system, [patients were expected](#) to be passive. The health-care provider was the knowledge keeper for your body, so you did what they said without question. That's why it was revolutionary when, in the 1950s, psychologists started saying that [people can cure their own problems when they get the right support](#).

In the following decades, other experts (including several [influential Canadians](#)) brought even more ideas, like how patients should be [seen as unique human beings](#). ([Indigenous peoples understood this](#) long before colonizers did.)

Three ways to push for person-centered care

[Person-centered care has become essential](#). Especially when it comes to [chronic diseases](#), you need to self-monitor, self-care and advocate for yourself. So what can you do to take your health into your own hands?

Do your research: Information is power. Learn as much as you can about your [health condition\(s\)](#) [to gain confidence, make appointments more efficient and even improve your relationship with your health-care provider](#). Don't know where to start? [Ask your local librarian](#) if they have any research tips or book suggestions. Join a virtual community and look for learning opportunities (like workshops or webinars at [the Alzheimer's society](#), [Diabetes Canada](#) or other big organizations). If you have a health-care provider, Google them to find out what they do, if they speak your native language and what their training background is. If you don't, service directories may help you find a health-care provider who meets your needs. For example, [Rainbow Health Ontario](#) has a directory of LGBT2SQ-friendly care providers.

Be prepared: Don't be afraid to bring in a list of questions and concerns, and take notes [to help you remember what the health-care provider said](#) (for example, jargon you'll want to look up later). You can also bring in a support person, like a friend or family member, [for emotional support, to advocate for you, to help with decision-making or to take notes](#). Show your health-care provider that you want to know more about your health and [don't be afraid to speak up if you're feeling dismissed](#).

Give feedback: The challenge with person-centered care is that [problems in the health system](#), like staffing shortages, can make it harder to do. But you can help change the system. [Be kind to your health-care providers](#). Share your opinions (on the good and the bad) by filling out patient surveys when you get them. You can also join a patient and family advisory council, committee or network. These are groups of people with lived experience that help improve the health-care system. As a member of a patient and family advisory council myself, I have given feedback on hiring decisions, safety planning, education and more. Look online to find a local, provincial or national group (like the [Patient Advisors Network](#)).

While you might not be able to change the system on your own, always remember that your voice matters.

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