



GLA:D™ program

Shifting the focus from illness to wellness. Innovative program helps people with osteoarthritis stay active and live well.

Our challenge	Results to date	
<p>1 in 4 Albertans will live with osteoarthritis by 2040</p> <hr/> <p>Each year, 10,000 Albertans need non-surgical supports to manage their osteoarthritis</p>	<p>600+ patients attended a GLA:D program¹ in 2017</p> <hr/> <p>90% patients feel they benefited from the program¹</p> <p>35% increased their daily activity¹</p> <p>71% use the information they learned daily¹</p>	<p>GLA:D participants report a</p> <p>↓ 28% reduction in pain levels¹</p> <hr/> <p><i>Improving health outcomes through preventative care in the community</i></p>

What was the issue?

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis. Due to a growing and aging population, it's estimated that one in four Albertans will live with osteoarthritis by 2040 and have difficulty performing day-to-day tasks due to joint pain. Although many will seek a joint replacement, surgery is not the best option for about half the people entering the hip and knee surgical program. This is either because they are too early in their osteoarthritis disease progression, or because other medical conditions mean surgery can't be done safely. That leaves about 10,000 Albertans each year who need other, non-surgical supports to manage their osteoarthritis.

What we did to address it

In 2016, the Bone and Joint Health SCN decided to pilot the GLA:D program in Alberta as a way to support people with hip and knee osteoarthritis, help them manage their condition, and prevent it from worsening. GLA:D, which stands for Good Life with osteoArthritis: Denmark, provides advice and exercise support to help people stay active and live well. It teaches them how movement and exercise can help manage pain, and it supports patients who experience joint pain as they start to exercise. Patients report that once they understand why they're moving and exercising in certain ways, they're much more willing to continue with an exercise plan.

Partnerships have been key to the program's success. Bone and Joint Canada is leading the national implementation, and private physiotherapy clinics have been quick to adopt GLA:D. Today, more than 125 clinicians have trained in GLA:D, and the program is now offered in 27 communities across Alberta.

How this work is making a difference

GLA:D is helping improve quality of life for patients living with osteoarthritis. One year after completing the program, patients report improved quality of life, reduced pain levels, improved mobility, and reduced use of pain medications.¹ And because these improvements are making a difference in their lives, patient satisfaction with the program is high. Some participants are able to delay or avoid surgical interventions, and others report that even if they require surgery, they are better prepared for the recovery due to improved strength and pain management gained from exercise.

"Through the GLA:D program, people with osteoarthritis can learn to gain some control over their chronic condition," says Kira Ellis, provincial osteoarthritis practice lead with the Bone and Joint Health SCN. "They can improve their own functional mobility and take steps to reduce their pain through exercise and lifestyle choices."

Results from Denmark suggest that GLA:D may help reduce knee replacement surgeries and delay surgery for some patients.² In Alberta, we're seeing growing demand and wait times for arthroplasty (surgical reconstruction and replacement of joints). Although GLA:D is still in the pilot stage in Alberta, we see potential to help patients manage pain, promote function in the interim, and recover faster after surgery.

What's next?

Uptake has been excellent across the province, and patients have begun calling local healthcare providers looking for ways they can participate. The program is now spreading to Primary Care Networks (PCNs), and as of February 2019, eight PCNs have trained clinicians and are offering GLA:D to local communities. Going forward, we anticipate further expansion into other healthcare settings and remote communities in northern Alberta. Expansion is also underway for other bone and joint conditions.³ Results of the pilot study are expected in July 2019.

Participants glad to feel better

Kathryn Winkler started driving her 85-year-old mom Katharina to a GLA:D exercise class in Calgary for osteoarthritis. A short time later, she moved off the sidelines and began participating herself. "I thought, 'I'm here anyway, and I have a little bit of osteoarthritis developing in my hips, so it can't hurt, right?'" 56-year-old Winkler recalls.

She's glad she did. After completing the eight-week program, she reports less pain and better mobility. "This isn't just for seniors. It's great for everyone," Winkler says. "I think it's one of the first things to prescribe when someone has osteoarthritis."

In hour-long group exercise sessions, participants learn how to sit and stand properly; control movement; build muscular strength through functional exercises; and apply these exercises to everyday activities.

Paul Fitzpatrick, a 68-year-old Calgary man with severe arthritis in both knees, is an early proponent of the GLA:D program. He says he sees a surgeon once a year to determine if the time has come to look at knee replacement surgery. "The last time I saw him he said, 'Keep on doing whatever you're doing'," Fitzpatrick says. "I think it's definitely helped me. The longer I can postpone surgery, the better."

To learn more, visit www.ahs.ca/glad