

Experiences of Accessing Rehabilitation by People Living with Long COVID

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Background

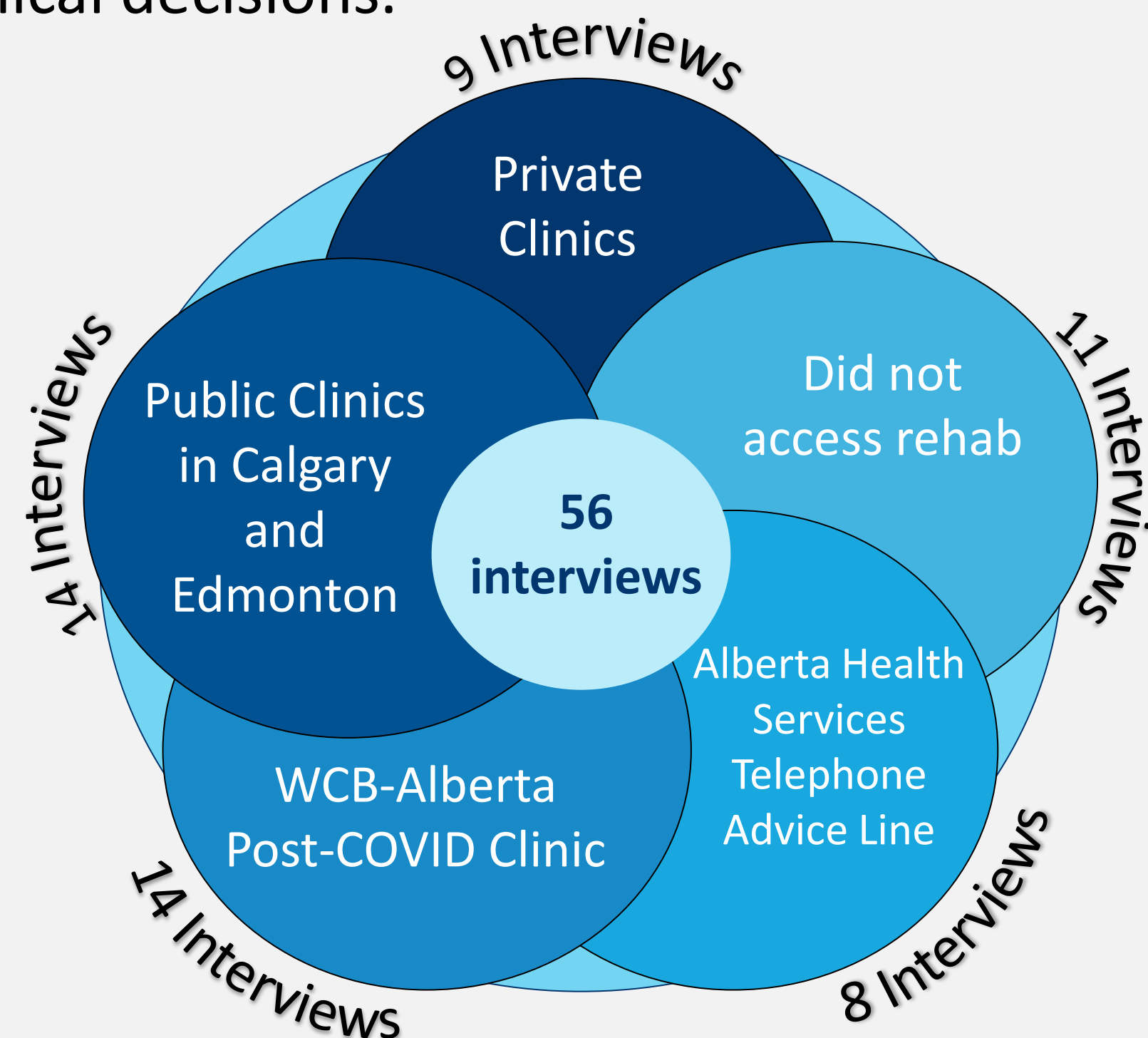
Little is known about the experiences of individuals living with Long COVID with regards to access to healthcare services.

Objective

To better understand the need for, access to, and quality of Long COVID rehabilitation services in Alberta, Canada.

Methods

Interpretive Description: A practice-oriented qualitative approach partly aimed at informing clinical decisions.

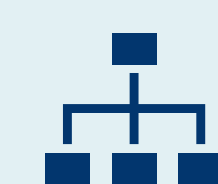


- One-on-one qualitative interviews via Zoom or phone
- Semi-structured interview guide
- Interview synopses facilitated team analysis

Informed by Levesque et al.'s "A Conceptual Framework of Access to Health Care"



Results



Inductive and iterative analytic approach using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis

THEMES

Theme 1: The Burden of Searching for Guidance to Address Challenges with Functioning and Disability

- Impact of physical symptoms on functioning triggered the search
- Lack of clarity puts the onus on the patient (to find services)
- Flying solo – A trial and error process at their own expense

"I'm grateful that the resources were there ... [but] I had to know about it, I had to find it, I had to know how to access it and then I had to make it happen" (P12-F, media coverage)

Theme 2: Supportive Relationships Promote Engagement in Rehabilitation

- Patient-provider relationships were pivotal
- Integrating peer support into rehabilitation

"non-judgmental and patient-focused...like a team...not just like the expert giving advice to the patient" (P8-F, private PT clinic)

Theme 3: Conditions for Participation in Safe Rehabilitation

- Flexible care delivery
- Ability to self-monitor symptoms during and after rehabilitation

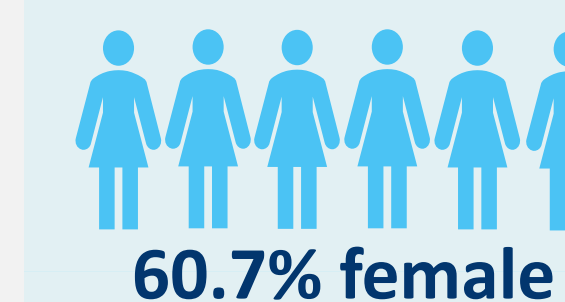
"the first week I think I had nine hours of appointments. And I kept saying it's too much, and then they say...we'll cut it back, but then they just never did. And then I just went downhill" (P17-F, WCB program)

Theme 4: Looking Forward: Provision of Appropriate Interventions at the Right Time

- Early education on pacing, rest, and energy management
- Coordinated care that can address multiple symptoms
- Communication of local information about safe rehabilitation

"...if there were ... multidisciplinary clinics where you could just go ... then have ... information for like how to rest ... pace ... track your heart rate ... just kind of an all-in-one place ... it would be really helpful to ... have that information up front..." (P11-F, private PT clinic)

DEMOGRAPHICS

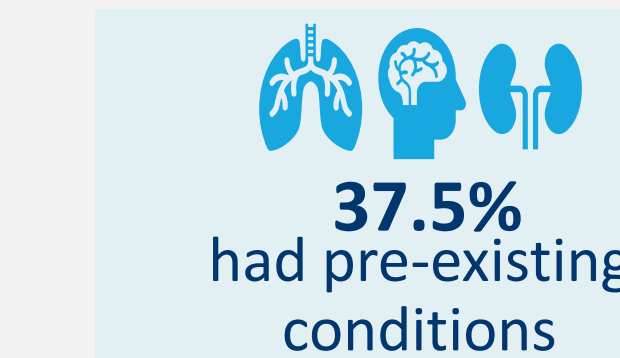


89.3% Unvaccinated at time of infection

12 WAVE 1	33 WAVE 2
10 WAVE 3	1 WAVE 4



MIN AGE	MEAN AGE	MAX AGE
20 years	49.29 years	74 years



Conclusions and Implications

- Educate providers** on multi-disciplinary Long COVID services, referral pathways, self-management resources, and emerging evidence
- Encourage providers to listen, reassure, and validate** patients' experiences and support development of local peer support networks
- Provide clear and simple information** about the importance of pacing and energy or activity management earlier
- Ensure flexibility** in appointment scheduling and delivery format (i.e., in-person versus virtual)
- Exercise caution when prescribing exercise** or conducting physical testing to avoid post-exertional symptom exacerbation

Read the paper



Acknowledgements

We would also like to acknowledge and sincerely thank the 56 individuals with Long COVID who participated in interviews for our study.

