

Pelvic Floor Dysfunction: Improving Outcomes and Lowering Costs



1 in 3

women will experience
PFD in their lifetime

Despite the fact that nearly **one in three women will experience pelvic floor dysfunction (PFD) in their lifetime**,¹ lack of access to information, stigma, and inadequate care coverage will prevent the majority of those women from getting the treatment they need. Not only does this upset the quality of life for millions of women living with PFD, it also drives up costs for benefits providers including health plan payers and self-funded employers.

By offering more comprehensive, accessible pathways to care, benefits providers can help members and employees prevent, manage, and address PFD symptoms and associated comorbidities before they escalate into lost productivity, costly interventional treatment like surgery, and compromised quality of life.

Read on for a deep dive into the critical role of the pelvic floor, its dysfunctions, and how benefits providers can play a pivotal role in transforming care access and outcomes for those affected.



Understanding the pelvic floor and its dysfunctions

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles that run from the pubic bone to the tailbone and plays a pivotal role in maintaining the proper function of the abdomen's lower organs, including the bladder, intestines, and for women, the uterus. Comprising muscles and tissues, this supportive structure ensures the optimal operation of urinary and fecal continence, sexual function, and stability within the pelvic region.

Symptoms of pelvic floor dysfunctions vary but often manifest as persistent discomfort in the pelvic region, urinary and/or fecal incontinence, pain,

constipation, and pelvic organ prolapse, or noticeable bulges in the vaginal area. According to the National Library of Medicine, women suffering from pelvic floor disorders might face various challenges including⁶:

- Sexual issues
- Social isolation
- Difficulty managing daily tasks and responsibilities
- Skin infections
- Ulcers
- Anxiety and depression
- Diminished self-esteem
- Feelings of guilt
- Sleep disturbances
- Social isolation

In most cases, physical therapy exercises designed to strengthen the pelvic floor can help women effectively prevent, manage, and even treat PFD symptoms. So why are so many women still suffering in silence?

Stigma and lack of access to care

2023 data reveals that 15% of women suffering from PFDs were unable to recognize their symptoms, and 69% had not spoken with a medical professional about their concerns.² Symptoms are often seen as too private or taboo to discuss openly, and many women simply accept their condition as natural part of childbirth or aging.

Healthcare providers – busy with a myriad of health topics to address – often miss opportunities to ask questions about, provide information on, or diagnose PFD. And, health plans don't always support coverage for specialty providers, which greatly impacts the number of women who are able to seek care.

This lack of support is even more pronounced in rural areas, where access to specialized healthcare services is often limited. Women in rural communities face significant disparities in care, with fewer financial or educational resources, and longer distances to travel for treatment compared to their urban counterparts.³

Understanding these challenges highlights a crucial gap in our healthcare system – a gap that, if addressed, could significantly alleviate the burden of PFDs for countless women and the costs they incur to payers and employers.

The rising cost of pelvic floor dysfunctions

Despite their best intentions, many benefits providers still fall short in providing proper education and treatment coverage, resulting in symptoms that worsen over time and eventually require more expensive treatment plans, diagnostics, and surgeries. But the cost to both the payer and employer doesn't stop there.

In the United States, billions are spent annually on urinary incontinence alone – a main symptom of PFD.⁴ In fact, according to a study done by the National Library of Medicine, the annual cost of urinary incontinence management and treatment was estimated at \$66 billion (as of 2007), with an expected increase to \$82.6 billion by 2020. Although about 70% of those costs are typically paid out of pocket, insurance companies and other payers face costs of about \$12 billion and still increasing.⁴

Chronic pelvic pain (CPP) – another noteworthy PFD symptom – is often associated with decreased productivity and increased absenteeism, which can diminish workplace efficiency and lower employee satisfaction.⁵

Yet, the financial implications tied to PFD extend well beyond direct medical costs and workplace disruptions. The broader economic impact becomes even more pronounced when considering the disorder's comorbidities. For example, studies show that CPP is directly correlated with anxiety and depression,⁵ a comorbidity that costs employers over \$51 billion in absenteeism from work and lost productivity, and \$26 billion in direct treatment costs every year.⁷

So what can benefits providers do to improve these outcomes and lower costs for both patient and payer?

Making pelvic floor dysfunction healthcare accessible

Benefits providers that provide proper education on pelvic floor health, common PFD symptoms, preventive treatment, and available pathways to care, see both tangible and intangible outcomes. To achieve this, many organizations are turning to digital solutions that break down barriers to care, and empower members and employees to access information and support on their own terms and timelines.

With digital-first pelvic floor therapies, like the one offered by Kaia Health, women can access personalized care plans with physical exercises, educational resources, relaxation techniques, and 1:1 coaching to alleviate PFD symptoms like pelvic pain, bowel and bladder dysfunction, and postpartum recovery. Developed by the Kaia Health clinical team, using the latest evidence and research, these therapies are not only effective, but scalable for organizations looking to optimize healthcare expenditure while ensuring the well-being of its members and employees.



As a mom and physical therapist, I've personally encountered the challenges of recognizing the need for pelvic floor therapy and gaining access to appropriate care. Our goal is to provide evidence-based education, health coaching, and physical and mental exercises that help women identify, understand, and address their pelvic floor symptoms to more effectively manage pain.

— Nicole Fellows, Physical Therapist
at Kaia Health

For more information on the pelvic floor support offered by Kaia Health, visit our [Newsroom](#).



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