

National Health Standard for Pediatric Pain Management

Dr. Kathryn Birnie Leads the Development of the First National Health Standard for Pediatric Pain Management

By Sarah Gulash (Regina)

Many children in Canada experience pain that is preventable, unrecognized, and untreated. Untreated pain can have negative short- and long-term consequences for the physical and emotional wellbeing of children and families. Dr. Kathryn Birnie, Clinical Health Psychologist and Assistant Professor in the Department of Anesthesiology, Perioperative and Pain Medicine at the University of Calgary, is determined to improve pediatric pain management in Canada and globally. A leader in pain research and patient partnership, Dr. Birnie recently led the development of the first national standard to guide pediatric pain management in Canada. These standards were created in partnership with Solutions for Kids in Pain (SKIP) and the Health Standards Organization (HSO), a national working group of 15 members, which include researchers, clinicians, policy makers, and patient partners. They are based on findings from various literature reviews, clinical expertise, evidence-informed practices, and lived experience. Their development followed the requirements for designation as a National Standard of Canada by the Standards Council of Canada (SCC).



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The standard aims to guide the delivery of equitable and quality pediatric pain management in hospital settings that provide inpatient, procedural, and/or outpatient services in children's, community/regional, and rehabilitation hospitals. It is hoped that this standard will improve consistency and effectiveness of pain management for children and their families across health-care settings. The standard doesn't provide a particular approach or intervention to pain management but is rather focused on how organization leaders and care teams should provide care based on the unique needs, goals, abilities, and preferences of each child and their family.

The standard is based on the four transformative goals laid out by the 2021 Lancet Child & Adolescent Health Commission (Eccleston et al., 2021) regarding pain management; make pain matter, make pain understood, make pain visible, and make pain better. The content of the standard is structured into six sections:

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Content of the National Health Standard for Pediatric Pain Management

1. **Make Pain Matter:** Establishing a Pediatric Pain Management Framework
2. **Make Pain Understood:** Professional Development to Create a Knowledgeable and Confident Workforce
3. **Make Pain Visible:** Comprehensive Pain Assessment and Reassessment
4. **Make Pain Better:** Co-developing an Individualized Care Plan
5. **Make Pain Better:** Multimodal Pain Management Strategies
6. **Make Pain Matter:** Continuous Quality Improvement for Pediatric Pain Management

The standard aims to guide the delivery of equitable and quality pediatric pain management in hospital settings.



This standard aims to ensure that pain is frequently assessed and adequately managed and that children and families seeking care are equal members of the care team by allowing them to be involved in discussions and decisions regarding pain care. Medical professionals working under this standard are expected to work with children and families to create a personalized pain care plan to reflect the unique personal needs, goals, abilities and preferences of the patient and family. Families learn about the various approaches to managing pain along with the benefits and risks of each option. The ultimate goal is for children and families to feel safe talking to others about pain and feel comfortable asking for help when it is needed.

[Learn more about the Pediatric Pain Management standard and download your own free copy.](#)