



# **Cognitive and Mind-Body Therapies for Chronic Low Back and Neck Pain: Effectiveness and Value**

**Final Evidence Report**

**November 6, 2017**

**Prepared for**



**AUTHORS:**

Jeffrey A. Tice, MD  
Professor of Medicine  
University of California, San Francisco

Varun Kumar, MBBS, MPH, MSc  
Health Economist, Institute for Clinical and Economic Review

Ifeoma Otuonye, MPH  
Research Associate, Institute for Clinical and Economic Review

Margaret Webb, BA  
Research Assistant, Institute for Clinical and Economic Review

Matt Seidner, BS  
Program Manager, Institute for Clinical and Economic Review

David Rind, MD, MSc  
Chief Medical Officer, Institute for Clinical and Economic Review

Rick Chapman, PhD, MS  
Director of Health Economics, Institute for Clinical and Economic Review

Daniel A. Ollendorf, PhD  
Chief Scientific Officer, Institute for Clinical and Economic Review

Steven D. Pearson, MD, MSc  
President, Institute for Clinical and Economic Review

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## About ICER

The Institute for Clinical and Economic Review (ICER) is an independent non-profit research organization that evaluates medical evidence and convenes public deliberative bodies to help stakeholders interpret and apply evidence to improve patient outcomes and control costs. ICER receives funding from government grants, non-profit foundations, health plans, provider groups, and health industry manufacturers. For a complete list of funders, visit <http://www.icer-review.org/about/support/>. Through all its work, ICER seeks to help create a future in which collaborative efforts to move evidence into action provide the foundation for a more effective, efficient, and just health care system. More information about ICER is available at <http://www.icer-review.org>

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The California Technology Assessment Forum (CTAF) – a core program of ICER – provides a public venue in which the evidence on the effectiveness and value of health care services can be discussed with the input of all stakeholders. CTAF seeks to help patients, clinicians, insurers, and policymakers interpret and use evidence to improve the quality and value of health care.

The CTAF Panel is an independent committee of medical evidence experts from across California, with a mix of practicing clinicians, methodologists, and leaders in patient engagement and advocacy. All Panel members meet strict conflict of interest guidelines and are convened to discuss the evidence summarized in ICER reports and vote on the comparative clinical effectiveness and value of medical interventions. More information about CTAF is available at <https://icer-review.org/programs/ctaf/>

The findings contained within this report are current as of the date of publication. Readers should be aware that new evidence may emerge following the publication of this report that could potentially influence the results. ICER may revisit its analyses in a formal update to this report in the future.

*In the development of this report, ICER’s researchers consulted with several clinical experts, patients, and other stakeholders. The following clinical experts provided input that helped guide the ICER team as we shaped our scope and report. None of these individuals are responsible for the final contents of this report or should be assumed to support any part of this report, which is solely the work of the ICER team and its affiliated researchers.*

*For a complete list of stakeholders from whom we requested input, please visit:*  
<https://icer-review.org/material/back-and-neck-pain-stakeholders/>

## **Expert Reviewers**

### **Steven Atlas, MD, MPH**

Director, Primary Care Research and Quality Improvement Network  
Massachusetts General Hospital

*No relevant conflicts of interest to disclose, defined as more than \$10,000 in healthcare company stock or more than \$5,000 in honoraria or consultancies during the previous year from health care manufacturers or insurers.*

### **Ravi Prasad, PhD**

Clinical Associate Professor, Anesthesiology, Perioperative and Pain Medicine  
Director, Stanford Comprehensive Interdisciplinary Pain Program  
Stanford University School of Medicine

*No relevant conflicts of interest to disclose, defined as more than \$10,000 in healthcare company stock or more than \$5,000 in honoraria or consultancies during the previous year from health care manufacturers or insurers.*

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## List of Acronyms Used in this Report

<b>AAPM</b>	American Academy of Pain Medicine
<b>AHRQ</b>	Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
<b>ACP</b>	American College of Physicians
<b>AMSTAR</b>	A Measurement Tool to Assess Systematic Reviews
<b>APS</b>	American Pain Society
<b>CBT</b>	Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
<b>CDC</b>	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<b>CMS</b>	Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
<b>CPGS</b>	Chronic Pain Grade Scale
<b>FFbHR</b>	Functional questionnaire Hannover for everyday diagnosis of functional impairment by back pain
<b>GAD-2</b>	Generalized anxiety disorder scale
<b>HADS</b>	Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale
<b>ICSI</b>	Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement
<b>MBSR</b>	Mindfulness-based stress reduction
<b>MCS</b>	Mental component score
<b>NDI</b>	Neck Disability Index
<b>NICE</b>	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
<b>NPQ</b>	Northwick Park Neck Pain Questionnaire
<b>NSAID</b>	Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs
<b>ODI</b>	Oswestry Disability Index
<b>OMPSQ</b>	Örebro Musculoskeletal Pain Screening Questionnaire
<b>PCS</b>	Physical component score
<b>PHQ-8</b>	Patient Health Questionnaire-8
<b>POM</b>	Pain on movement
<b>PRISMA</b>	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
<b>PSS</b>	Perceived Stress Scale
<b>QALY</b>	Quality adjusted life year
<b>RMDQ</b>	Roland Morris Back Pain Disability Questionnaire
<b>SMD</b>	Standardized Mean Difference
<b>TENS</b>	Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USPSTF</b>	United States Preventive Services Task Force
<b>VAS</b>	Visual analog scale
<b>WMD</b>	Weighted Mean Difference

# Executive Summary

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## Background

Low back and neck pain are two of the most common reasons for patient visits to physicians in the United States. The estimated total cost for low back and neck pain in the United States (US) was \$88 billion in 2013, third highest after heart disease and diabetes.<sup>1</sup> Total cost for low back and neck pain has increased faster than any other group of diagnoses, from \$30.4 billion in 1996 to \$87.6 billion in 2013. This does not include the indirect costs related to missed work and disability.

A wide range of non-invasive therapies have been evaluated for chronic pain. This review focuses on five such non-drug therapies for chronic low back pain and chronic neck pain: acupuncture, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), yoga, and tai chi. We recognize that there is no perfect descriptor for this group of therapies, but for this report we have categorized them as cognitive and mind-body therapies.

## The Topic in Context

Most people experience low back and/or neck pain during their lives. In the 2015 Global Burden of Disease study, low back and neck pain was the leading cause of disability in most countries.<sup>2</sup> Because low back pain often occurs in younger individuals, it is a common cause of missed work and reduced productivity resulting in high indirect costs.<sup>3</sup>

Low back and neck pain are typically classified by duration of symptoms as acute (<4 weeks), subacute (4-12 weeks), and chronic (>12 weeks) phases. Most acute pain resolves quickly and patients are able to return to work.<sup>4</sup> Patients with chronic back and neck pain tend to have fluctuating levels of pain and disability that rarely resolve.<sup>4</sup> Most of the disability and cost associated with back and neck pain are in patients with chronic pain.<sup>3,5</sup>

Chronic pain, which is the focus of this review, is considered to be qualitatively different from the other two phases. There is ongoing pain generation in the tissue, but the patient's perception of the pain is out of proportion to the level of damage.

There are many treatment interventions for chronic low back and neck pain including surgical, pharmacologic, and nonpharmacologic. For many of these interventions, such as chronic opioid therapy, the benefits are modest and the harms substantial. Safer, more effective alternatives are needed.

As noted above, chronic pain is hypothesized to be, in part, a cognitive issue. Thus, cognitive and mind-body interventions may be particularly efficacious in the treatment of chronic pain. However,

they are often not covered by insurance in typical health plans and thus access to such treatments is limited and often involves out of pocket payments by patients.<sup>6</sup> Given the interest in promoting effective alternatives to both opioid therapy and invasive options for chronic pain, we thought it timely to evaluate evidence on the effectiveness of cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back and neck pain.

During the initial phase of this review, the American College of Physicians (ACP) released a new clinical practice guideline<sup>7</sup> based on an exhaustive systematic review of non-invasive interventions for low back pain performed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).<sup>8-10</sup> We elected to use the relevant parts of their review as the basis for our own evidence review for chronic low back pain, supplemented by new randomized trials published since their search was performed. We also adopted their approach in our evidence review of cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic neck pain.

## **Comparative Clinical Effectiveness**

We abstracted data on the interventions considered in this review from the AHRQ systematic review of therapies for low back pain and from subsequent randomized trials of the same interventions for patients with chronic low back pain. Evidence on intervention effectiveness focused on studies of at least six months' duration or studies of more limited duration with outcomes assessed at least four weeks after the cessation of active therapy. Similarly, we abstracted data from systematic reviews of these same five interventions for chronic neck pain and from subsequent randomized trials for the same indication. Following the approach of the AHRQ review, we qualitatively synthesized information from the systematic reviews and randomized trials. Qualitative assessments were based on the consistency of the direction and magnitude of the effect size.

### **Clinical Benefits**

The most important benefit to patients is improvement in function (i.e., a greater ability to work and do their desired daily activities) even if they still have pain. The next most important benefit is a reduction in pain. If achieved, these should translate into improved quality of life.

### **Chronic Low Back Pain**

#### ***Acupuncture***

The evidence for the effectiveness of acupuncture for the treatment of chronic low back pain is complex. The majority of trials and meta-analyses confirm small to moderate improvements in function and pain compared with usual care immediately following the completion of therapy. However, the differences in outcomes are smaller and often non-significant clinically when compared to sham acupuncture, suggesting that much of the benefit may be from the placebo



effect. For example, the largest and longest randomized trial reported that 60% of patients treated with individualized acupuncture, standardized acupuncture, or sham acupuncture had clinically meaningful improvements in function compared with only 39% of patients in the usual care group ( $p < 0.001$ ).<sup>11</sup>

### ***Cognitive Behavioral Therapy***

The evidence for the effectiveness of CBT for the treatment of chronic low back pain is based on fewer trials than acupuncture, but they were larger and longer. The majority of trials and meta-analyses confirmed small to moderate improvements in function and pain compared with usual care immediately following the completion of therapy. In the most recent trial, the benefits were small, but sustained at one and two years of follow-up. There were additional benefits in terms of reduced depression and improved quality of life.

### ***Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction***

The evidence for the effectiveness of MBSR for the treatment of chronic low back pain is similar to that for CBT. The trial demonstrating sustained benefits for CBT found equivalent benefits for MBSR. As in the evidence base for CBT, the majority of trials and meta-analyses confirmed small to moderate improvements in function and pain compared with usual care immediately following the completion of therapy. In the most recent trial, the benefits were small, but sustained at one and two years of follow-up. The additional benefits observed for CBT (reduced depression and improved quality of life) were smaller and not significant for MBSR.

### ***Yoga***

The AHRQ review concluded that yoga had small to moderate benefits compared with education and usual care, but with low strength of evidence. We identified an additional four randomized trials with longer follow-up that support the effectiveness of yoga for low back pain, though the magnitude of the benefits was smaller with longer follow-up.

### ***Tai Chi***

There was substantially less evidence for the effectiveness of tai chi for low back pain. On the basis of two fair-quality trials, the AHRQ review concluded that tai chi had a moderate effect on pain and a small effect on function with low strength of evidence. We did not identify any additional randomized trials.

## Chronic Neck Pain

### ***Acupuncture***

The evidence for the effectiveness of acupuncture for the treatment of chronic neck pain is similar to that for chronic low back pain. The majority of trials and meta-analyses confirmed small to moderate improvements in function and pain compared with usual care immediately following the completion of therapy.

### ***Cognitive Behavioral Therapy***

The evidence for the effectiveness of CBT for the treatment of chronic neck pain is less robust than the evidence for low back pain. The majority of trials are short term and equivocal in terms of significant reductions in disability and pain beyond the active treatment period.

### ***Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction***

We did not identify any randomized trials of MBSR for chronic neck pain that reported outcomes at least four weeks after the end of active treatment or that lasted six months.

### ***Yoga***

We did not identify any randomized trials of yoga for chronic neck pain that reported outcomes at least four weeks after the end of active treatment or that lasted six months.

### ***Tai Chi***

We identified one small trial of tai chi for chronic neck pain. Only 38 patients were randomized to the tai chi arm. The trial was open label with the comparison group, a wait list, potentially susceptible to the nocebo effect due to disappointment from not being randomized to the active group. The effect size on function (7 points on the 100-point NDI) and pain (1 point on a 10-point VAS) were small and potentially exaggerated by the lack of blinding. There were no differences comparing tai chi to neck exercises.

### **Harms**

These five interventions were well-tolerated for both back and neck pain. No serious adverse events that were thought to be related to the intervention were reported in the trials. Commonly-reported adverse events included bleeding and pain at the site of acupuncture needles, and strains and joint aches in patients receiving the MBSR, yoga, tai chi interventions. An increase in back and neck pain for up to one month was sometimes reported. No adverse events were reported with CBT.

## Controversies and Uncertainties

There are a number of issues that are important to consider when assessing the evidence base for the cognitive and mind-body interventions. First, each of the categories of interventions considered represents a range of possible interventions. There are many different approaches to acupuncture, different kinds of CBT, and there many different schools of yoga and tai chi and different poses and breathing techniques that could be used within each school. It may be that there is one form of yoga that is particularly effective at managing chronic low back pain, but that form of yoga has not been identified in trials to date. The number and quality of the studies is not sufficiently high to identify a particular sub-genre of any of the mind body therapies as most effective. The heterogeneity within each mind-body intervention is further complicated by variation in the skill level of the therapist teaching patients each of the interventions. MBSR is the one intervention with an agreed upon standard approach to teaching the intervention and training the teachers.

There is also significant heterogeneity within each disease category. There are many different causes for chronic low back and neck pain. Low back pain and neck pain can be sub-divided into those with and without radicular symptoms. Chronic neck pain caused by whiplash is one common subtype. Some patients are being treated with chronic opioid therapies and some suffer from concomitant depression. There may be mind-body interventions that are particularly effective in one of these subtypes of low back and neck pain, but to date the evidence base is not sufficiently robust to identify any variation in effectiveness for any of the therapies we examine.

Some studies found that sham acupuncture was almost as effective as traditional acupuncture or structured acupuncture, but that both were significantly more effective at improving function and decreasing pain compared with usual care. The differences in outcomes between acupuncture and sham acupuncture were less than the differences between them and usual care. This suggests that a significant proportion of the benefit from acupuncture is the placebo effect. Some argue that this is a useful employment of the placebo effect, while others argue that it is unethical to recommend such treatment.

Finally, it is difficult to interpret the clinical significance of average changes in continuous measures of function, quality of life, and pain. Categorical measures reporting the proportion of patients achieving a clinically meaningful improvement in function, quality of life, and pain are more useful and should be reported in addition to average group changes.

## Summary and Comment

As discussed above, the evidence from the clinical trials suggest that the five cognitive and mind-body interventions evaluated in this assessment have no important harms. Thus, the conclusions above on clinical benefits drive our judgments on the net health benefits for these interventions. The following tables reflect those judgments.

## Chronic Low Back Pain

**Table ES1. Comparative Clinical Effectiveness for Mind-Body Interventions for Chronic Low Back Pain Added to Usual Care Versus Usual Care Alone Over the Long Term**

Intervention	Net Health Benefit	Level of Certainty	ICER Evidence Rating
Acupuncture	Small	Moderate	C+: Comparable or better
CBT	Small	Moderate	C+: Comparable or better
MBSR	Small	Moderate	C+: Comparable or better
Yoga	Small	Moderate	C+: Comparable or better
Tai Chi	Small	Low	P/I: Promising, but inconclusive

CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction

## Chronic Neck Pain

**Table ES2. Comparative Clinical Effectiveness for Mind-Body Interventions for Chronic Neck Pain Added to Usual Care Versus Usual Care Alone Over the Long Term**

Intervention	Net Health Benefit	Level of Certainty	ICER Evidence Rating
Acupuncture	Small	Low	P/I: Promising, but inconclusive
CBT	Small to none	Low	I: Insufficient
MBSR	Unknown	Low	I: Insufficient
Yoga	Unknown	Low	I: Insufficient
Tai Chi	Small to none	Low	I: Insufficient

CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction

## Comparative Value

### Overview<sup>i</sup>

The aim of this analysis was to estimate the cost-effectiveness of the cognitive and mind-body interventions considered in this review for the treatment of chronic low back pain. We did not model the use of any of the nonpharmacologic interventions for chronic neck pain due to a lack of published evidence on key clinical inputs required for the model, such as intervention-related efficacy estimates and quality of life estimates associated with chronic neck pain and improved pain status following interventions. Each of the interventions (acupuncture, CBT, MBSR, yoga, and tai chi) was compared to usual care, which was defined as self-care guidance and educational information on stretching, strengthening, exercise, and lifestyle modifications. Intervention frequency was based on trial data (Table ES3). The modeled population was patients with chronic low back pain who were untreated or had not been previously treated with any of the included

<sup>i</sup> The economic analysis results have been updated since the October 19, 2017 public meeting of the California Technology Assessment Forum

interventions, and the population was 60% female with a mean age of 47 years, similar to the populations seen in clinical trials.<sup>12,13</sup> We estimated the total costs, quality-adjusted life years (QALYs) gained, incremental cost per case of clinically-significant pain improvement (i.e., intervention success), and incremental cost-effectiveness ratios relative to usual care, using a health care system perspective over a five-year time horizon. Uncertainty in data inputs and assumptions was evaluated through sensitivity and scenario analyses.

**Table ES3. Frequency and Duration of Interventions to Treat Chronic Low Back Pain**

Intervention	Frequency and Intensity	Reference
<b>Acupuncture</b>	Two 20-minute sessions/week for three weeks followed by one 20-minute session/week for four weeks	Cherkin et al., 2009 <sup>11</sup>
<b>CBT</b>	One two-hour group session/week for eight weeks	Cherkin et al., 2016 <sup>12</sup>
<b>MBSR</b>	One two-hour group session/week for eight weeks plus optional 6-hour retreat	Cherkin et al., 2016 <sup>12</sup>
<b>Yoga</b>	One 75-minute session/week for 12 weeks	Sherman et al., 2011 <sup>13</sup>
<b>Tai Chi</b>	Two 40-minute sessions/week for eight weeks followed by one 40-minute session/week for two weeks	Hall et al., 2011 <sup>14</sup>

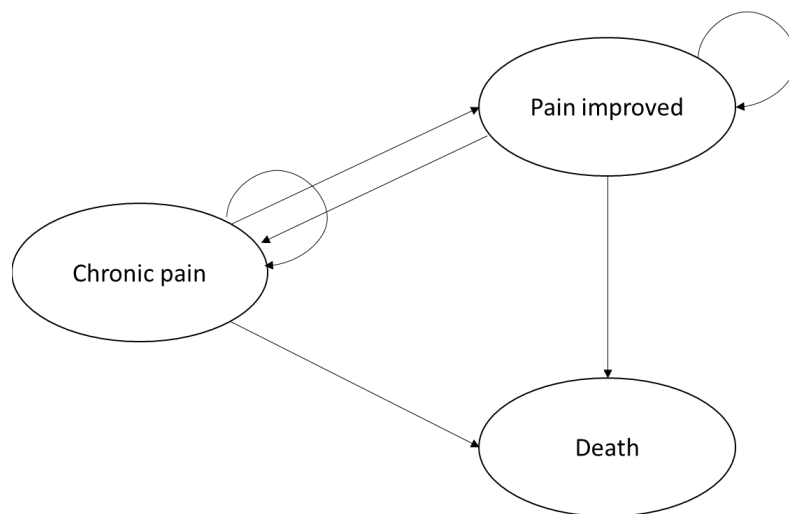
CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction

## Methods

We built a *de novo* Markov model that consisted of three health states: “chronic pain,” “pain improved,” and “death,” as depicted in Figure ES1. Patients entered the model in the chronic pain health state, and could remain in that health state or transition to a pain improved state or death at the beginning of each cycle. Patients transitioned between health states during six-month cycles over a five-year time horizon. The model used a 3% discount rate for costs and health outcomes, and costs were converted to 2016 US dollars.

The base-case analysis was conducted from a health care system perspective, and thus focused on all direct intervention costs and medical care costs.

**Figure ES1. Markov Model Structure for Chronic Low Back Pain Patients**



The model was informed by several assumptions.

- Intervention effectiveness data was sourced from multiple trials due to a lack of head-to-head comparisons.
- Due to a lack of published evidence, no subsequent lines of therapies were modeled for those who failed or intervention or relapsed after initial success. In addition, our objective was to assess the value of different interventions and not intervention pathways.
- Beyond the first cycle of the model, pain improvement was assumed to be spontaneous with the same probability as that of usual care.
- The probability of transitioning from the “chronic pain” state to the “pain improved” state was assumed to be the same as the probability of improved disability (based on change in RMDQ score).
- All interventions except tai chi were awarded the same measure of effectiveness due to similarity in this estimate across trials.
- We did not model the health or economic outcomes of adverse events due to a lack of published evidence on such adverse events.
- Chronic pain recurrence was assumed to be the same each year and the same across all interventions and usual care.

A detailed description of key model assumptions can be found in Table 5.1 of the full report.

### ***Model Inputs***

Transition probabilities for chronic low back pain were based on the percentage of patients who had a clinically-meaningful improvement in disability using the RMDQ score (i.e., a  $\geq 30\%$  improvement in RMDQ score). We assumed that all interventions except for tai chi had the same

probability of pain improvement per cycle (0.6) because clinical trial data suggested similar efficacy for these interventions; the probability of pain improvement for tai chi was 0.5. The transition probabilities associated with usual care for pain improvement and with relapse to chronic pain following any intervention or usual care were 0.441 and 0.259, respectively.

The health state utility point estimate for chronic pain was 0.66 and was obtained from trial data.<sup>15</sup> The utility estimate associated with pain improvement was 0.81, which was calculated using estimates from the same trial and assuming an average intervention likelihood of improvement of 0.6. This calculation is available in Appendix Table E3.

Costs included all direct costs of care, including intervention and usual care costs for chronic low back pain as well as background health care costs. As several of these interventions may not currently be covered by payers, we included out-of-pocket prices reported in the grey literature as part of direct costs. Intervention costs were applied once during the first model cycle, and a fee for a 15- or 25-minute doctor's office visit was applied to the cost of each intervention or usual care, respectively. Since usual care consisted of self-care, no additional costs beyond background health care costs were added to this arm. All intervention costs listed in Table ES4 are per-session costs, based on sessions provided in a group format, except for acupuncture, CBT, and usual care, which are provided to patients on an individual basis. We were unable to identify representative published real-world data on costs of group pain CBT sessions; given that most CBT across various conditions is provided in individual sessions, we used costs for individual sessions in our model.

Background health care costs included additional office visits, hospital stays, laboratory tests, and pharmacologic therapy, and differed based on health state.<sup>16</sup> All costs were inflated to 2016 US dollars using the medical care component of the US Consumer Price Index.<sup>17</sup>

**Table ES4. Cost Inputs**

Service	Cost	Source
Acupuncture (per session)	\$104*	Zhang, 2014 <sup>18</sup>
CBT (per session)	\$212*	Gore et al., 2012 <sup>19</sup>
Yoga (per session)	\$18	Assumed to be the same cost as a session of tai chi
MBSR (per session)	\$59 <sup>†</sup>	Innerwell Integrative Counseling Services <sup>20</sup>
Tai Chi (per session)	\$18	The Tai Chi Center <sup>21</sup>
Office Visit Costs for Active Intervention <sup>‡</sup>	\$52	Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services <sup>22</sup>
Usual Care Costs (total) <sup>§</sup>	\$109*	Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services <sup>22</sup>
<b>Background Care Costs per Patient per Cycle</b>		
Chronic Pain	\$701	Fritz et al., 2012 <sup>16</sup> , Gore et al., 2012 <sup>23</sup>
Improved Pain <sup>#</sup>	\$301	

\*One-on-one session

<sup>†</sup>Calculated by dividing total course cost of \$475 by eight sessions; costs associated with the six-hour retreat were amortized over the eight sessions.

<sup>‡</sup>Assumed to be one office visit pertaining to referral to active intervention, using CPT code 99213 for an established patient visit for a 15-minute duration.

<sup>§</sup>Assumed to be one office visit pertaining to obtaining patient education book on self-care, using CPT code 99214 for an established patient visit for a 25-minute duration.

<sup>#</sup>Assumed 43% of costs seen in patients with chronic pain, derived from Gore et al., 2012, comparing health care costs for patients with chronic low back pain and population without chronic low back pain.

## Base-Case Results

Each of the nonpharmacologic interventions resulted in increased costs and QALYs compared to usual care over the five-year time horizon (Tables ES5 and ES6). Since we assumed the same transition probabilities for all active interventions except tai chi, QALY gains were the same for all remaining interventions, with very small incremental gains compared to usual care (0.017). Tai chi had an even smaller incremental QALY gain of 0.006 relative to usual care. All interventions were estimated to fall within the cost-effectiveness threshold of \$100,000 per QALY gained relative to usual care, with yoga being the most cost-effective at approximately \$3,900 per QALY gained.

Because we used the same utility estimates for all interventions, the same response rate to therapy for all interventions except tai chi, and the same relapse rate for all interventions, the variation in the incremental cost-effectiveness ratios across interventions is primarily driven by the differences in individual intervention costs.



**Table ES5. Base-Case Deterministic Results**

Therapy	Costs	QALYs
Acupuncture	\$5,657	3.4338
CBT	\$6,316	3.4338
MBSR	\$5,0972	3.4338
Yoga	\$4,832	3.4338
Tai Chi	\$4,992	3.4234
Usual Care	\$4,767	3.4173

CBT: cognitive-behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction, QALY: quality-adjusted life year

**Table ES6. Base-Case Deterministic Incremental Results Versus Usual Care**

Therapy	Incremental Costs	Incremental QALYs	Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio vs. Usual Care (Cost per QALY Gained)
Acupuncture	\$891	0.0165	\$53,933
CBT	\$1,549	0.0165	\$93,799
MBSR	\$330	0.0165	\$19,975
Yoga	\$65	0.0165	\$3,929
Tai Chi	\$225	0.0061	\$36,759
Usual Care	--	--	--

CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction, QALY: quality-adjusted life year

Among the five interventions, the incremental cost of achieving one case of improved pain over the five-year time horizon relative to usual care ranged from \$660 for yoga to approximately \$15,800 for CBT. Because each intervention's benefit (i.e., pain improvement) occurred within the first two cycles of the model and subsequent benefit was spontaneous and non-intervention related, we used the number of cases with improved pain at the end of one year of treatment.

**Table ES7. Incremental Cost per Successful Treatment (Pain Improvement) Versus Usual Care**

Therapy	Costs
Acupuncture	\$9,067
CBT	\$15,770
MBSR	\$3,358
Yoga	\$660
Tai Chi	\$6,180

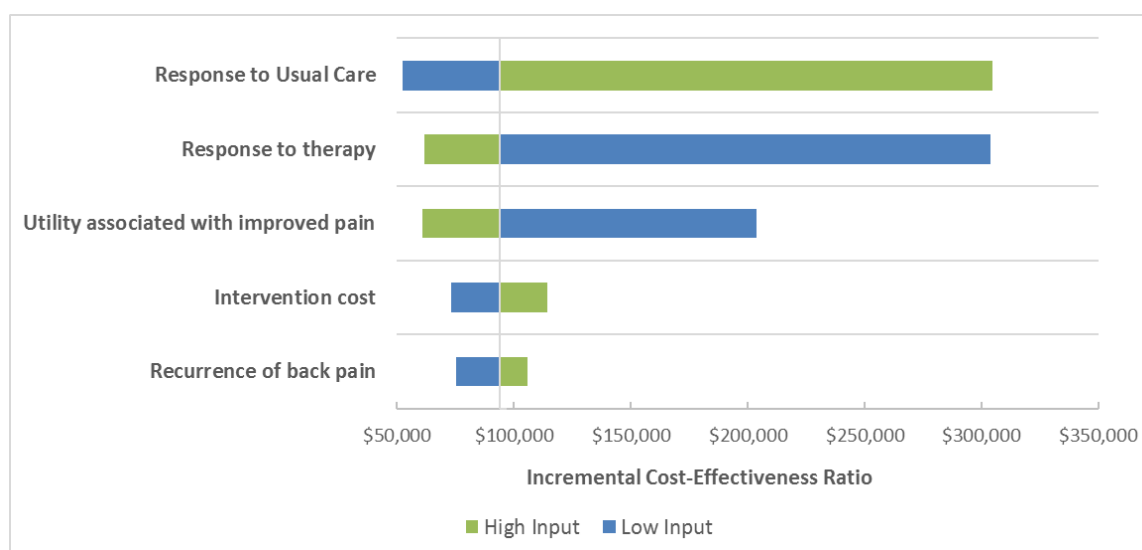
CBT: cognitive-behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction, QALY: quality-adjusted life year

### **One-Way Sensitivity Analyses**

One-way sensitivity analyses were conducted for each intervention by varying key model parameters. As an example, we have presented results for the one-way sensitivity analysis for CBT,

the least cost-effective intervention in our analysis, in Figure ES2 and Table ES8. Results of one-way sensitivity analyses for the other interventions are available in Appendix Tables E5-E8 and Figures E1-E4. Results were most sensitive to response to usual care followed by response to interventions. Results were least sensitive to the probability of pain recurrence, followed by intervention costs.

**Figure ES2. One-Way Sensitivity Analysis: Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Versus Usual Care**



Base-case ICER: \$93,799 per QALY gained

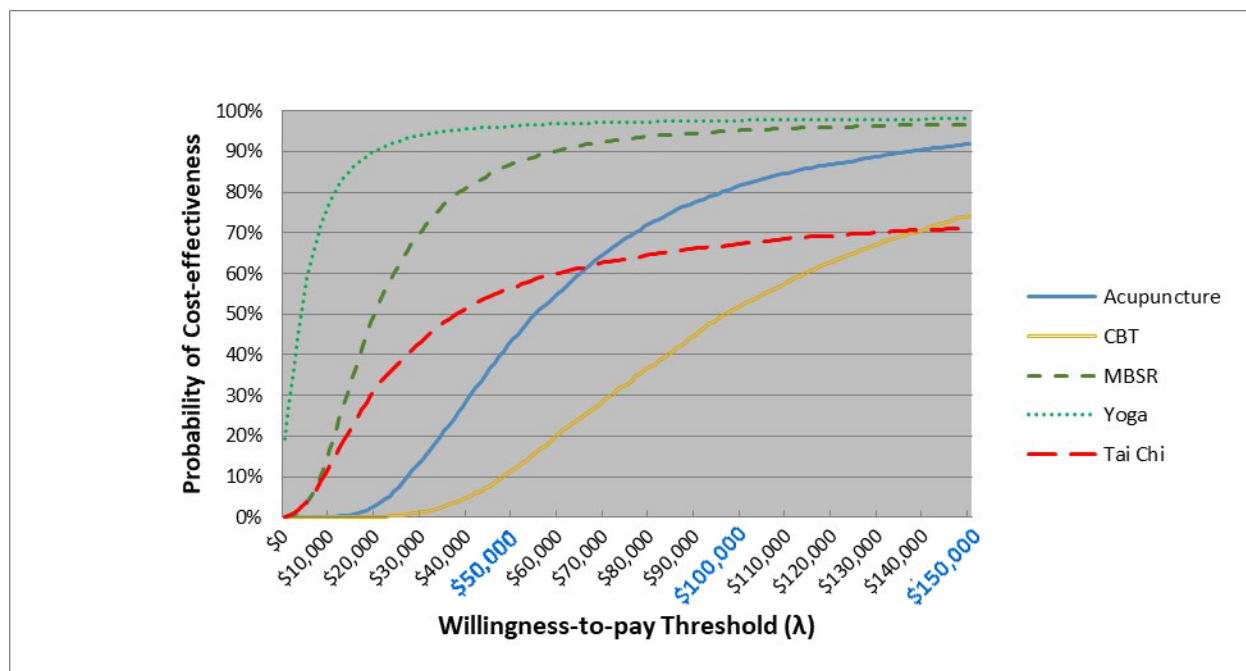
**Table ES8. One-Way Sensitivity Analysis: Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Versus Usual Care**

	Low Input	High Input	Low Input Result	High Input Result	Range
Intervention Cost	\$169.42	\$254.12	\$73,282	\$114,312	\$41,029
Response to Therapy	0.492	0.676	\$303,721	\$61,740	\$241,982
Response to Usual Care	0.359	0.542	\$52,603	\$304,697	\$252,094
Recurrence of Back Pain	0.126	0.346	\$75,481	\$105,832	\$30,350
Utility Associated with Improved Pain	0.729	0.891	\$203,910	\$60,908	\$143,002

### ***Probabilistic Sensitivity Analysis Results***

We also conducted a probabilistic sensitivity analysis (Figure ES3), jointly varying model inputs over 5,000 simulations. Incremental cost-effectiveness ratios for CBT were lower than the commonly-cited cost-effectiveness threshold of \$150,000 per QALY in approximately 74% of simulations, while those for yoga were lower than the threshold in approximately 98% of simulations.

**Figure ES3. Cost-Effectiveness Acceptability Curves for the Cognitive and Mind-Body Therapies Compared to Usual Care**



## Scenario Analyses

Shortening the model time horizon to one and three years resulted in higher (less favorable) incremental cost-effectiveness ratios compared to the base-case. For the one-year time horizon, incremental cost-effectiveness ratios ranged from approximately \$20,700 per QALY gained for yoga to approximately \$273,800 per QALY gained for CBT. Using a three-year time horizon, results ranged from approximately \$4,000 per QALY gained for yoga to approximately \$94,300 per QALY gained for CBT.

A modified societal perspective that included the costs associated with lost productivity in patients with chronic pain resulted in incremental cost-effectiveness ratios very similar to the base-case results, ranging from approximately \$2,000 per QALY gained for yoga to approximately \$91,900 per QALY gained for CBT, relative to usual care over the five-year time-horizon.

## Model Validation

Model validation followed standard practices in the field. Two modelers tested the mathematical functions in the model as well as therapy-specific inputs and corresponding outputs. We also compared the ICER model to previously published models. Our model had higher incremental cost-effectiveness ratios due to differences between model inputs such as sources for intervention-specific probability of response to chronic pain, the quality of life associated with chronic pain and improved pain, and costs of care, as well as structural differences such as assumptions around the

frequency of intervention use beyond the first cycle of the model, relapse to chronic pain in subsequent model cycles, and model time-horizons. Additional detail regarding model comparisons can be found in the full report.

### Value-Based Benchmark Prices

Our value-based benchmark prices for the five cognitive and mind-body therapies for low back pain are presented in Table ES9. As the literature did not point to a single, consistent price estimate for any of these interventions we have presented the discounts from the assumed base case price per session that would be required to achieve the two cost-effectiveness thresholds. While the per-session costs may vary, the total cost of each intervention at each threshold would be equal for all interventions except tai chi, as these interventions were awarded the same probability of effectiveness in the model. The \$100,000 and \$150,000 per QALY gained threshold prices for all interventions were higher than the base-case price estimates, indicating that a price premium could be applied.

**Table ES9. Value-Based Benchmark Prices per Session of Cognitive and Mind-Body Therapies for Chronic Low Back Pain**

Intervention	Cost per Session	Price to Achieve \$100,000 per QALY	Price to Achieve \$150,000 per QALY	Discount/Premium from Current Cost to Reach Thresholds
Acupuncture	\$103.58	\$179.66	\$262.24	+73% to +153%
CBT	\$211.77	\$224.58	\$327.79	+6% to +55%
MBSR	\$59.38	\$224.58	\$327.79	+278% to +452%
Yoga	\$17.50	\$149.72	\$218.53	+756% to +1149%
Tai Chi	\$17.50	\$39.03	\$56.05	+123% to +220%

CE: cost-effectiveness, QALY: quality-adjusted life year

“+” Indicates premium

### Potential Budget Impact

We used results from the same model employed for the cost-effectiveness analyses to estimate total potential budget impact. Potential budget impact was defined as the total differential cost of using the specific low back pain interventions rather than usual care for the treated population, calculated as differential health care costs minus any offsets in these costs from averted health care events.

We derived the number of eligible patients with chronic low back pain for a hypothetical cohort of 1 million members of a managed care organization. With a point prevalence of 13.1%, based on The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES, 2009–2010), applied to the hypothetical cohort of 1 million members, the number of patients with chronic low back pain was estimated to be 131,000.<sup>24</sup> According to a survey by the American Physical Therapy Association

(APTA), only 63% of all patients with low back pain seek professional help for pain relief.<sup>25</sup> Applying this percentage to the estimated population with chronic low back pain resulted in an eligible population of 16,506 patients each year, for a total of 82,530 patients over all five years.

We included only MBSR, yoga, and tai chi in the budget impact analysis, deriving the potential budget impact of each of these interventions relative to usual care. We did not include the other interventions, as evidence suggests that some payers currently cover them (see Section 3.1 of the full report).

We modeled the three interventions against usual care, varying their uptake over five years to 10%, 25% and 50% of the eligible population. In addition to reporting the results for each intervention over five years, we have also reported the per member per month (PMPM) cost for each intervention relative to usual care. The PMPM cost is the total monthly spending on a pool of insured members of a plan divided by the total number of plan members.

### ***Yoga***

Annual potential budget impact ranged from approximately \$124,300 to approximately \$621,300 when treating 10% (2% per year) to 50% (10% per year) of the eligible cohort with yoga relative to usual care. The average potential budget impact over the five-year period was \$41 per patient (Table ES10). The PMPM cost ranged from \$0.01 to \$0.05 when treating 10% to 50% of the eligible cohort with yoga (Figure ES4).

### ***Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction***

Annual potential budget impact ranged from approximately \$561,800 million to approximately \$2.8 million when treating 10% to 50% of the eligible cohort with MBSR relative to usual care. The average potential budget impact over the five-year period was \$162 per patient (Table ES10). The PMPM cost ranged from \$0.05 to \$0.23 when treating 10% to 50% of the eligible cohort with MBSR (Figure ES4).

### ***Tai Chi***

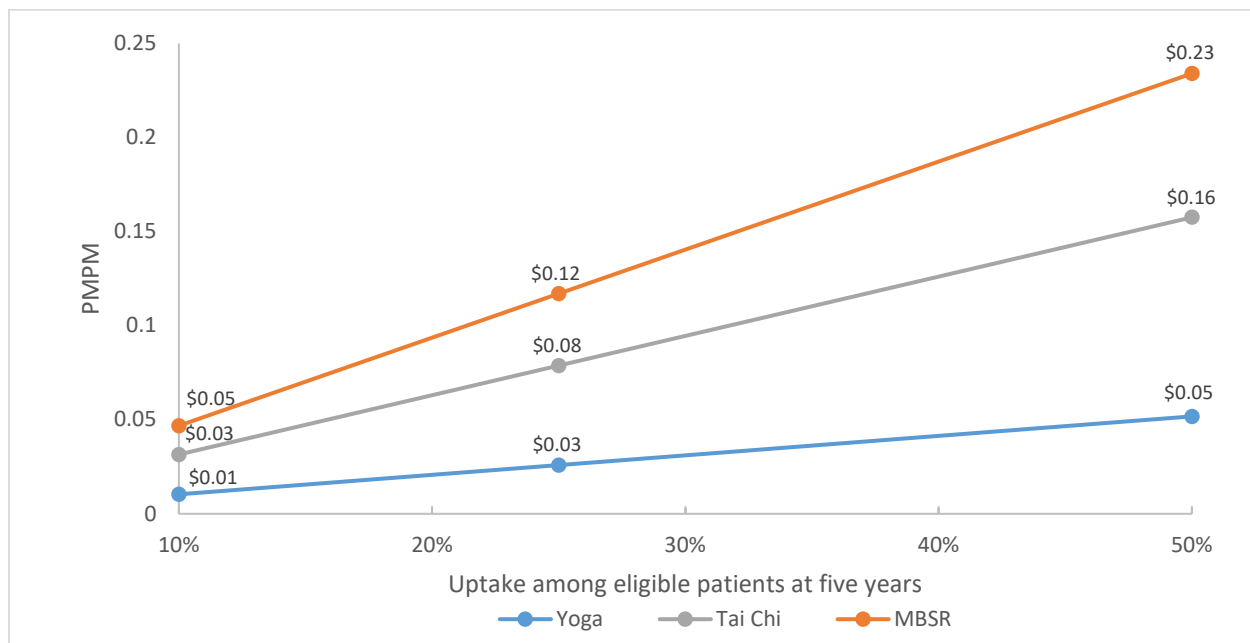
Annual potential budget impact ranged from approximately \$378,300 to approximately \$1.9 million when treating 10% to 50% of the eligible cohort with tai chi relative to usual care. The average potential budget impact over the five-year period was \$107 per patient (Table ES10). The PMPM cost ranged from \$0.03 to \$0.16 when treating between 10% and 50% of the eligible cohort with tai chi (Figure ES4).

**Table ES10. Annualized Per Patient Potential Budget Impact Calculations Over a Five-Year Time Horizon**

	Average Annualized Per-Patient Budget Impact			
	Yoga	MBSR	Tai Chi	Usual Care
<b>Per-Patient Budget Impact</b>	\$1,193	\$1,314	\$1,259	\$1,152
<b>Difference (Intervention – Usual Care)</b>	\$41	\$162	\$107	--

MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction

**Figure ES4. Per-Member Per-Month Cost for Yoga, MBSR, and Tai Chi at Varying Percentages of Treatment Uptake Among the Eligible Cohort**



By way of comparison, Express Scripts estimates that its 2017 expenditures for medications to treat pain and/or inflammation, including mostly generic NSAIDs, gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) analogs, and opioids, will total \$4.46 PMPM.<sup>26</sup> Our highest budget impact estimate (\$0.23 PMPM if 50% of the eligible population were treated with MBSR) would represent only 5% of this PMPM spend.

## Summary and Comment

We estimated the cost-effectiveness of acupuncture, CBT, MBSR, yoga, and tai chi compared to usual care for patients with chronic low back pain. We did not model chronic neck pain for any of the interventions due to a lack of published evidence on key model inputs. The cost per additional QALY ranged from approximately \$3,900 for yoga to approximately \$93,800 for CBT over a five-year

time horizon. The findings were most sensitive to the response to usual care and response to the intervention. The findings were also sensitive to time horizon, with a shorter time horizon resulting in higher incremental cost-effectiveness ratios relative to usual care. A scenario analysis using a modified societal perspective produced results similar to those in the base-case analysis.

Our model had several limitations. First, we did not model varying treatment effectiveness over time due to availability of only short-term trial data. We assumed that the effectiveness of the intervention, defined by the probability of transitioning to improved pain from a chronic pain state for that specific intervention, occurred only in the first cycle when patients receive an intervention, after which improvement in pain status mirrored that of improvement seen with usual care. Second, we did not model subsequent lines of intervention (and resulting pain improvement) for individuals who experienced a recurrence of low back pain due to a lack of published evidence on this estimate. Third, the background health care costs for those with improved pain were derived from a claims analysis by Gore et al., which consisted of a control cohort *without* back pain (i.e., not with “improved pain”). Fourth, we assumed 100% adherence to each intervention, which would not occur in actual practice. Fifth, our base-case cost and cost-effectiveness results for the nonpharmacologic interventions reflect current evidence available on average intervention costs, which may vary widely by region and level of insurance coverage.

CBT intervention costs were based on individual, not group session costs, given the more widespread availability of individual CBT and the lack of data on costs of groups CBT. However, treatment efficacy inputs for CBT came from trials of group CBT. If group CBT became more widely available, costs would be lower than in our base analysis and access would likely be improved.

We examined the budget impact of three interventions, MBSR, yoga, and tai chi, that are not routinely covered by insurance. Our analysis looked at different levels of uptake, and at a high rate of uptake (50%) for the most expensive of the three interventions (MBSR), the additional PMPM cost would be \$0.23. For comparison, this is approximately 5% of the estimated PMPM medication costs for treating pain and/or inflammation at a large national pharmacy benefits management company.

## Other Benefits and Contextual Considerations

Our reviews seek to provide information on other benefits or disadvantages offered by the intervention to the individual patient, caregivers, the delivery system, other patients, or the public that would not have been considered as part of the evidence on comparative clinical effectiveness. These elements are listed in Tables ES11-12.

**Table ES11. Potential Other Benefits**

Potential Other Benefits	Description
<b>This intervention provides significant direct patient health benefits that are not adequately captured by the QALY.</b>	None
<b>This intervention offers reduced complexity that will significantly improve patient outcomes.</b>	We do not think that these interventions reduce complexity. Many of them require sustained behavior change for ongoing effectiveness.
<b>This intervention will reduce important health disparities across racial, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, or regional categories.</b>	None
<b>This intervention will significantly reduce caregiver or broader family burden.</b>	Chronic pain has impacts on everyone that the patient touches. Improved management of chronic pain will likely reduce caregiver / family burden.
<b>This intervention offers a novel mechanism of action or approach that will allow successful treatment of many patients who have failed other available treatments.</b>	Not applicable
<b>This intervention will have a significant impact on improving return to work and/or overall productivity.</b>	Chronic low back pain, in particular, is a major cause of both short- and long-term disability. The benefits of the mind-body interventions are modest at best, but may help some patients return to work or be more productive at their job.
<b>Other important benefits or disadvantages that should have an important role in judgments of the value of this intervention.</b>	<p>One potential benefit that has not been adequately studied would be to reduce or avoid the use of opioid medications for chronic pain.</p> <p>As noted above, a disadvantage is that most of these interventions require ongoing behavior change, which is often difficult to maintain.</p>



**Table ES12. Potential Contextual Considerations**

Contextual Consideration	Description
<b>This intervention is intended for the care of individuals with a condition of particularly high severity in terms of impact on length of life and/or quality of life.</b>	As noted in the topic in context section, chronic back and neck pain are common and lead to significant reductions in productivity including patients requiring long-term disability.
<b>This intervention is intended for the care of individuals with a condition that represents a particularly high lifetime burden of illness.</b>	Same as above.
<b>This intervention is the first to offer any improvement for patients with this condition.</b>	No
<b>Compared to usual care, there is significant uncertainty about the long-term risk of serious side effects of this intervention.</b>	There may be advantages compared to long-term opioid therapy given the known harms associated with opioid therapy. However, there is a lack of evidence about whether the mind-body interventions can prevent initiation of opioid therapy or facilitate tapering opioid therapy.
<b>Compared to usual care, there is significant uncertainty about the magnitude or durability of the long-term benefits of this intervention.</b>	Yes. As noted under controversies and uncertainties, there is evidence of waning benefit with time and few trials reported outcomes at one year, much less over a longer time period.
<b>There are additional contextual considerations that should have an important role in judgments of the value of this intervention.</b>	None

## CTAF Votes

The CTAF Panel deliberated on key questions raised by ICER’s report at a public meeting on October 19, 2017 in Oakland, California. The results of these votes are presented below, and additional information on the deliberation surrounding the votes can be found in the full report. No long-term value for money votes were required for MBSR and yoga, as both interventions had incremental cost-effectiveness ratios below \$50,000 per QALY gained, indicating these are high-value interventions by default. There was also no long-term value vote taken for tai chi, as the majority of the panel judged that the evidence was inadequate to demonstrate a net health benefit for tai chi added to usual care versus usual care alone (question 5).

1) For individuals with chronic low back pain, is the evidence adequate to demonstrate that **acupuncture** provides additional net health benefit when **added to usual care**?

<b>Yes: 14 votes</b>	No: 0 votes
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2) For individuals with chronic low back pain, is the evidence adequate to demonstrate that **cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)** provides additional net health benefit when **added to usual care**?

Yes: 14 votes	No: 0 votes
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3) For individuals with chronic low back pain, is the evidence adequate to demonstrate that **mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)** provides additional net health benefit when **added to usual care**?

Yes: 14 votes	No: 0 votes
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4) For individuals with chronic low back pain, is the evidence adequate to demonstrate that **yoga** provides additional net health benefit when **added to usual care**?

Yes: 14 votes	No: 0 votes
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5) For individuals with chronic low back pain, is the evidence adequate to demonstrate that **tai chi** provides additional net health benefit when **added to usual care**?

Yes: 6 votes	No: 8 votes
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6) For individuals with chronic low back pain, is the evidence adequate to distinguish the additional net health benefits provided by **acupuncture, CBT, MBSR, yoga, and tai chi**?

Yes: 3 votes	No: 11 votes
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7) Given the available evidence on comparative effectiveness and incremental cost-effectiveness, and considering other benefits, disadvantages, and contextual considerations, what is the long-term value for money of treatment with **acupuncture and usual care** versus **usual care alone** for patients with chronic low back pain?

Low: 1 votes	Intermediate: 11 votes	High: 2 votes
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8) Given the available evidence on comparative effectiveness and incremental cost-effectiveness, and considering other benefits, disadvantages, and contextual considerations, what is the long-term value for money of treatment with **CBT and usual care** versus **usual care alone** for patients with chronic low back pain?

Low: 0 votes	Intermediate: 13 votes	High: 1 votes
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9) For individuals with chronic neck pain, is the evidence adequate to demonstrate that **acupuncture** provides additional net health benefit when **added to usual care**?

Yes: 11 votes

No: 3 votes

## Key Policy Implications

Following its deliberation on the evidence, the CTAF Panel engaged in a moderated discussion with a policy roundtable about how best to apply the evidence on cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back and neck pain to policy and practice. The policy roundtable members included two patients, two clinical experts, a private insurer, and a public insurer. The discussion reflected multiple perspectives and opinions, and therefore, none of the statements below should be taken as a consensus view held by all participants. The top-line policy implications are presented below, and additional information can be found in the full report.

### Payers

#### Chronic Low Back Pain

- The strength of evidence appears adequate to support coverage of acupuncture, CBT, MBSR, and yoga for chronic low back pain. Evidence is far weaker for tai chi. Draft sample coverage policies are provided in the full report.
  - Evidence-based boundaries on duration of therapy and on repetitive courses of therapy are reasonable given the potential for inappropriate overuse of services.
  - Because patients may have strong preferences and be inclined to respond favorably to some, but not all, of these management options, payers should consider covering all of these cognitive and mind-body options to maximize the chances for positive outcomes.
  - There is no evidence on the concurrent use of multiple modalities, so payers may wish to consider requests for concurrent treatment on a case-by-case basis.
  - Coverage policies for these treatments should be clear and efficient so that providers can order these therapies as easily as they order physical therapy or a pain medication.
  - Reimbursement for cognitive and mind-body therapies needs to be adequate to support a robust network of providers.

#### Chronic Neck Pain

- Given that there is far less evidence on the effectiveness of these cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic neck pain than for chronic low back pain, payers may wish to assess requests for coverage on a case-by-case basis.

## **Provider Groups**

- Integrate multiple options for cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back pain into local practices.

## **Specialty Societies**

- Develop clear guidelines for the use of cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back and neck pain.
- Develop appropriate licensing and credentialing criteria for practitioners certified to deliver these interventions for chronic low back pain.
- Educate providers about the value of cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back pain.

## **Researchers**

- Promote long-term studies of functional outcomes for these interventions
- Study the efficacy of these interventions at reducing or eliminating the use of opioid therapy in patients with chronic pain
- Study predictors of response to therapy.
- Study the dose response effect of these therapies and the incremental effectiveness of concurrent treatment with multiple modalities.
- Perform additional high-quality trials of these therapies for chronic neck pain

# 1. Background

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## 1.1 Introduction

### Background

Low back and neck pain are two of the most common reasons for patient visits to physicians in the United States. The estimated total cost for low back and neck pain in the United States (US) was \$88 billion in 2013, third highest after heart disease and diabetes.<sup>1</sup> Total cost for low back and neck pain has increased faster than any other group of diagnoses, from \$30.4 billion in 1996 to \$87.6 billion in 2013. This does not include the indirect costs related to missed work and disability.

A wide range of non-invasive therapies have been evaluated for chronic low back pain and chronic neck pain including pharmacologic therapies (e.g., non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs [NSAIDs], opioids, tricyclic antidepressants, anti-epileptic medications) and physical therapies (e.g., physical therapy, exercise therapy, high- and low-velocity manipulation). This review focuses on five non-drug therapies for chronic low back pain and chronic neck pain: acupuncture, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), yoga, and tai chi. We recognize that there is no perfect descriptor for this group of therapies, but for this report we have categorized them as cognitive and mind-body therapies. These different types of therapies are not mutually exclusive and at times are offered in conjunction with other forms of treatment. However, there are few studies evaluating combined therapy or sequencing of therapies. Patients are less often referred for mind-body therapies than for other non-invasive therapies, and it is uncertain whether this reflects limited clinician awareness of the value of these therapies, appropriate judgments about their relative effectiveness, local availability of these therapies, and/or coverage by insurance of these therapies.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, physicians frequently treat patients suffering from chronic pain with opioids.<sup>27</sup> Appropriate use of effective nonpharmacologic therapy has the potential to reduce the use of opioids in the management of such patients, which may be important given the epidemic of opioid abuse in the US.

Because chronic pain is often a life-long issue, we focused this review on intermediate (at least four weeks after the end of therapy or six months of follow-up) and long-term improvements in function, pain, and quality of life. We placed greater emphasis on functional outcomes, as these matter the most to patients.

### Scope of the Assessment

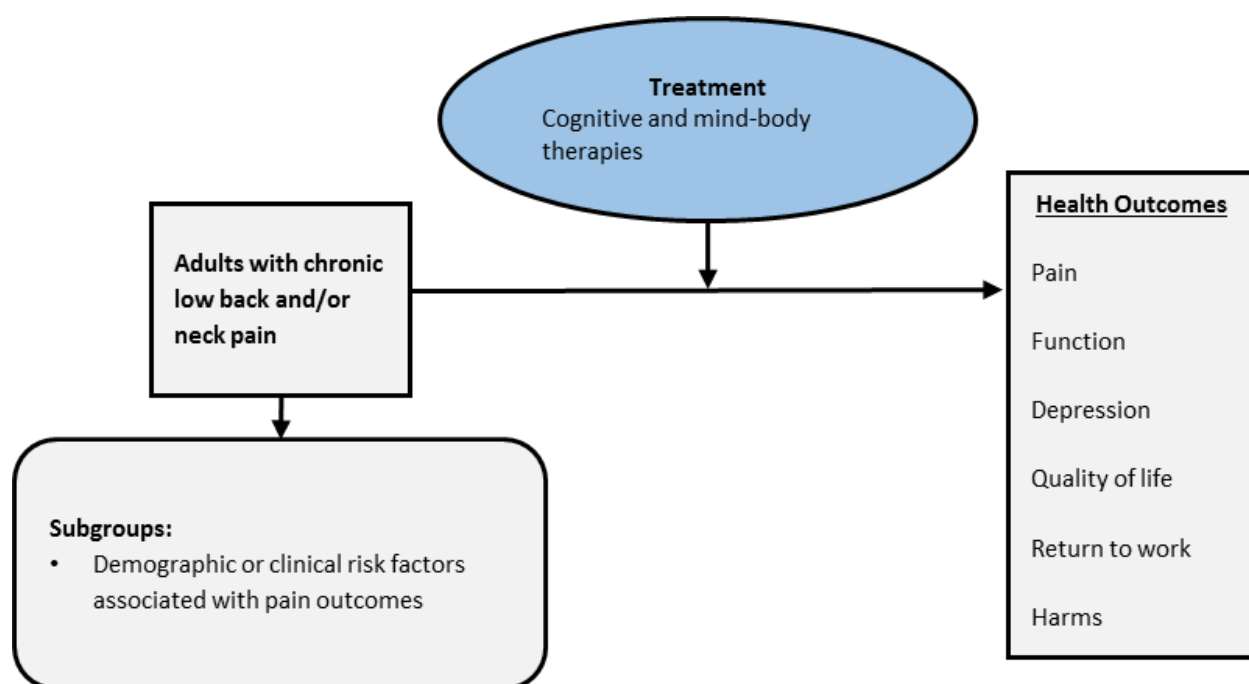
The scope for this assessment is described on the following pages using the PICOTS (Population, Intervention, Comparators, Outcomes, Timing, and Settings) framework. Evidence was abstracted

from systematic reviews and randomized controlled trials. For chronic low back pain, our review is based in part on the recent Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) review performed to support the updated American College of Physicians (ACP) guidelines on low back pain.<sup>7,98</sup> We performed our own review, analogous to that performed by AHRQ, for chronic neck pain. Our evidence review also includes input from patients and patient advocacy organizations.

## Analytic Framework

The analytic framework for this assessment is depicted in Figure 1.1.

**Figure 1.1. Analytic Framework:**



## Populations

The population for the review is adults 18 years of age and older suffering from chronic low back or neck pain that is not due to cancer, infection, inflammatory arthropathy, high-velocity trauma, fracture, and pregnancy, and that is not associated with progressive neurologic deficits; patients with whiplash were included. Chronic pain is defined by the presence of symptoms for at least 12 weeks. The interventions are evaluated separately for patients with chronic low back pain and for patients with chronic neck pain.

## ***Interventions***

The list of interventions was developed with input from patient organizations, clinicians, and insurers on which treatments to include. The full list of interventions is as follows:

- Acupuncture
- CBT
- MBSR
- Yoga
- Tai chi

## ***Comparators***

The primary comparison for each of these interventions was usual care or a sham/placebo intervention.

## ***Outcomes***

The primary goal of treatment is to improve function and reduce pain to allow patients to return to their usual daily activities including work. Improving function is the most important outcome. We also assessed harms associated with therapy as well as patient reported quality of life.

### **Primary Outcomes**

- Pain (e.g. visual analog scale)
- Function (e.g. Oswestry Disability Index, Roland Morris Disability Questionnaire)
- Depression (e.g. Patient Health Questionnaire 9; Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale)
- Return to work / disability
- Quality of life (e.g. Short Form 36)
- Harms (e.g. musculoskeletal injuries)

## ***Timing***

Evidence on intervention effectiveness focused on studies of at least six months' duration or studies of more limited duration with outcomes assessed at least four weeks after the cessation of active therapy (intermediate term), but trials with long-term outcomes (one or more years) were preferred.

## ***Settings***

All relevant settings were considered, with a focus on outpatient settings in the United States.

## 2. The Topic in Context

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Most people experience low back and/or neck pain during their lives. In the 2015 Global Burden of Disease study, low back and neck pain was the leading cause of disability in most countries.<sup>2</sup> Because low back pain often occurs in younger individuals, it is a common cause of missed work and reduced productivity resulting in high indirect costs.<sup>3</sup>

Low back and neck pain are typically classified by duration of symptoms as acute (<4 weeks), subacute (4-12 weeks), and chronic (>12 weeks) phases. Most acute pain resolves quickly and patients are able to return to work.<sup>4</sup> Patients with chronic back and neck pain tend to have fluctuating levels of pain and disability that rarely resolve.<sup>4</sup> Most of the disability and cost associated with back and neck pain are in patients with chronic pain.<sup>3,5</sup> Patients with poor coping strategies, mental health diagnoses, and poor overall health are more likely to transition from acute low back and neck pain to chronic pain.<sup>28</sup>

Chronic pain, which is the focus of this review, is considered to be qualitatively different from the other two phases. In acute pain, there is tissue damage and inflammation with activation of the pain centers of the brain.<sup>29</sup> With the transition to chronic pain, the pain centers remain activated, but there are significantly higher levels of activation of the emotional circuits and central sensitization amplifies the patient's perception of pain and other physical symptoms.<sup>29,30</sup> There is ongoing pain generation in the tissue, but the patient's perception of the pain is out of proportion to the level of damage.

There are numerous causes for low back and neck pain including degenerative disc disease, arthritis, disc herniation, and spinal stenosis, but these are often present in patients without low back or neck pain. It is often difficult to know if the pain experienced by a patient is due to one of these specific diagnoses.

There are many treatment interventions for chronic low back and neck pain. These interventions include those that are invasive (epidural injections, discectomy, laminectomy, spinal fusion, neurostimulation, implantable pumps), pharmacologic (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, corticosteroids, tricyclic anti-depressants, serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors, muscle relaxants, anti-seizure medications, and opioids), and nonpharmacologic (physical therapy, ultrasound, nerve stimulation, spinal manipulation, acupuncture, CBT, MBSR, yoga, and tai chi).

As noted above, chronic pain causes the greatest proportion of human and economic burden from back and neck pain.<sup>3,5</sup> Typically, patients with chronic pain have already unsuccessfully attempted treatment with the standard interventions used for acute low back and neck (rest, ice or heat, physical therapy, medications, and surgery where appropriate). In addition, chronic pain is hypothesized to be, in part, a cognitive issue. Thus, cognitive and mind-body interventions may be



particularly efficacious in the treatment of chronic pain. However, they are often not covered by insurance in typical health plans and thus access to such treatments is limited and often involves out of pocket payments by patients.<sup>6</sup> Given the interest in promoting effective alternatives to both opioid therapy and invasive options for chronic pain, we thought it timely to evaluate evidence on the effectiveness of cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back and neck pain.

During the initial phase of this review, the ACP released a new clinical practice guideline<sup>7</sup> based on an exhaustive systematic review of non-invasive interventions for low back pain performed by AHRQ.<sup>8-10</sup> We elected to use the relevant parts of their review as the basis for our own evidence review for chronic low back pain, supplemented by new randomized trials published since their search was performed. We also adopted their approach in our evidence review of cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic neck pain.

## **Cognitive and Mind-Body Therapies**

### ***Acupuncture***

Acupuncture is one element of traditional Chinese medicine in which thin needles are inserted into the skin at specific points in the body in order to influence the flow of qi, or energy, through meridians in the body. In western culture, acupuncture is sometimes described as placing needles in the body according to current understanding of the body's structure and function.<sup>31</sup> Typically, between five and 20 needles are inserted and left in place for up to 20 minutes.

Electroacupuncture is a modern variant of acupuncture in which the needles are attached to a source of continuous electric current. Acupuncture is used for many indications, but most commonly to treat pain.<sup>32</sup> Modern acupuncture is done by trained, licensed providers using sterile, single use needles. Potential harms include pain, infections and rarely pneumothorax.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Cognitive Behavioral Therapy***

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a category of psychotherapy typically delivered by a trained therapist. It focuses on helping individuals to develop their own coping strategies to manage the problem being addressed and to change unhealthy patterns of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. CBT focuses on a patient's current situation, rather than the influences of the past. It was originally developed to treat depression, but is now used for many indications including pain. The focus and content of CBT is different for each indication. Typically, CBT is delivered weekly in six to 18 hour-long sessions sometimes followed by maintenance sessions one to three months following the completion of the primary treatment.<sup>33</sup> The therapists typically prescribe some form of homework for the patient to do in between sessions. CBT-based coping skills education may also be delivered in small group settings. When used for pain, CBT includes both pain education and specific pain management skills. CBT is generally thought to have minimal or no potential harms.

## ***Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction***

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) uses a combination of mindfulness meditation, body awareness, and yoga to manage stress, pain, and improve quality of life. It was developed at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in the 1970s by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn. It is typically taught by certified trainers in a group setting during eight weekly two-hour sessions and a one-day, six-hour retreat. The training also involves daily practicing of mindfulness for 45 minutes. MBSR is generally thought to have minimal or no potential harms.

## ***Yoga***

Yoga is a group of physical, mental, and spiritual practices with origins in India. There are a number of different yoga traditions. When used as a form of medical therapy, yoga primarily refers to the use of a series of physical poses, breathing techniques, and meditation or relaxation aimed at restoring balance and improving well-being. Yoga is typically taught and practiced in group classes that last between 45 and 90 minutes. The primary harms are musculoskeletal injuries.<sup>34</sup> The most common tradition that is taught in the United States is hatha yoga, which includes Iyengar, Ashtanga, Vini, Kundalini, and Bikram yoga.

## ***Tai Chi***

Tai chi is a form of Chinese martial art. Like yoga, there are a number of different traditional forms of tai chi. The form popular in the United States and commonly adapted for promoting health is practiced with slow movements, deep breathing, relaxation, mindfulness, and meditation. Tai chi is supposed to balance the two opposing life forces in Chinese philosophy, yin and yang, that govern health. It may be practiced individually or in groups and is typically taught in group classes. Typical harms of tai chi include muscle soreness and foot or knee pain.

## **Definitions**

Chronic back and neck pain can be categorized by duration, location, intensity and functional impact. Several of the common approaches to classification are defined below. There is no consensus on what change in the measures of pain and function is clinically meaningful, but the commonly cited recommendations are described below.

**Table 2.1. Classification of Low Back or Neck Pain by Duration**

Classification	Duration
Acute	< 4 weeks
Subacute	4-12 weeks
Chronic	12 weeks

Radicular Pain: extremity pain, numbness, weakness due to irritation of a spinal nerve root.

Visual Analog Scale (VAS) for Pain Intensity: A self-reported pain intensity or severity scale from 0 to 10 or 0 to 100, with 0 being no pain and higher numbers representing worse pain. For consistency, we report all results on a 10-point scale (scores using a 100-point scale are divided by 10). A 1.5- to 2-point change in pain is usually considered clinically important, with some evidence that larger changes are needed for patients with more severe pain at initial assessment. A 30% change from baseline is also considered clinically significant.<sup>35</sup>

Visual Analog Scale (VAS) for Pain Bothersomeness: A self-reported pain scale from 0 to 10 or 0 to 100, with 0 being no bothersomeness from pain over the past week and higher numbers representing worse bothersomeness. For consistency, we report all results on a 10-point scale (scores using a 100-point scale are divided by 10). A 1.5- to 2-point change in pain is usually considered clinically important, with some evidence that larger changes are needed for patients with more severe pain at initial assessment. A 30% change from baseline is also considered clinically significant.<sup>35</sup>

Roland Morris Back Pain Disability Questionnaire (RMDQ): A self-reported questionnaire with 24 items that takes less than five minutes to complete. The score ranges from 0 to 24, with 0 representing no disability and 24 representing maximal disability. A common modification excludes one question and reports scores ranging from 0 to 23. A change of at least 5 points is considered clinically important. A 30% change from baseline is also considered clinically significant.<sup>35</sup>

Oswestry Disability Index (ODI): A self-reported questionnaire for low back pain that includes 10 sections assessing limitations on different activities of daily living. The questionnaire is scaled to 100 and takes less than five minutes to complete; higher scores represent greater disability. A change of at least 10 points is considered clinically important. A 30% change from baseline is also considered clinically significant.<sup>35</sup>

Neck Disability Index (NDI): The NDI is a modification of the ODI for neck pain. Like the ODI, it is a self-reported questionnaire for neck pain assessing limitations on different activities of daily living that is scaled to 100 and takes less than five minutes to complete. Higher scores represent greater disability. A change of at least 10 points is considered clinically important. A 30% change from baseline is also considered clinically significant.<sup>35</sup>

Northwick Park Neck Pain Questionnaire (NPQ): The NPQ is a nine-item questionnaire with each item scored from 0 to 4, and higher responses reflecting greater pain or disability.<sup>36</sup> The questionnaire is scored by adding up the responses and dividing by 36, and is reported as a percentage ranging from 0 to 100%. The higher the percentage, the greater the pain and disability. Follow-up questionnaires add an additional question asking about their global assessment of change on a five-point scale ranging from “much worse” to “much better.” A 25% reduction from

baseline is considered clinically significant as long as the patient reports at least “better” on the global rating of change question.<sup>37</sup>

Medical Outcomes Study Short-Form 36 (SF-36): A self-reported 36-item questionnaire that measures health-related quality of life across eight domains including both physical and emotional domains. It is scored from 0 to 100 with higher scores representing lower quality of life. Despite wide-spread use, the minimally important clinical difference is not established, though 5-10 points is often cited as clinically meaningful.

EuroQoL (EQ-5D): A self-reported questionnaire to assess health related quality of life in five dimensions: mobility, self-care, usual activities, pain/discomfort, and anxiety/depression plus a visual analog scale rating their overall health state. The minimally important clinical difference has not been established, despite the questionnaire’s widespread use in estimating patient utilities.

Standardized Mean Difference (SMD): The SMD is the mean (average) difference between two groups divided by the standard deviation. If the two groups represent a treatment group and a control group, the SMD is the number of standard deviations of the outcome measure due to the intervention. The scale is the number of standard deviations. This allows meta-analyses to estimate summary statistics combining results from studies that used different instruments to measure the same concept. For instance, results from the RMDQ and the ODI can be combined using the SMD.

Weighted Mean Difference (WMD): The weighted mean difference, on the other hand, is a summary using the scale of the measurement instrument. It assumes that the same scale was used in all of the trials that are combined in the meta-analysis. The individual trial estimates are usually weighted by the inverse of the variance when combining the trial results. For example, in a meta-analysis combining the results of trials of a therapy to reduce blood pressure, the WMD would be the pooled estimate of the change in blood pressure measured in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg).

### **Insights Gained from Discussions with Patients and Patient Groups**

Patients and patient advocacy organizations emphasized that chronic low back and neck pain can be life-changing events that force many patients to limit or stop their normal daily activities. Patients with chronic pain report feelings of anger, depression, and guilt related to their pain and its impact on their functioning, which can control all aspects of their life. A diagnosis of chronic pain poses similar challenges to family members who must modify their activities and expend considerable emotional energy to care for a family member in pain. One patient advocate told us the only difference between a family member and the person in pain is that the family member does not feel the pain, but they experience the anger, frustration, and guilt. Pain controls their life as well.

With regards to cognitive and mind-body therapies, we heard that access is a widespread problem for patients. Many of the therapies are not covered by patients’ insurance plans, so patients have

to pay out of pocket, which is challenging for individuals who are often limited in their ability to work due to pain. In addition, there are many areas of the country with little access to providers of cognitive and mind-body therapies.

The most important outcome to patients is improving their ability to function. They want to return to doing their usual activities of daily living. A second important aspect of great importance to patients is to relieve their sense of suffering. Patients want to be able to do the things that they used to enjoy. Examples included the ability to drive their car again or to go out to dinner at a restaurant without pain overwhelming their enjoyment of the experience.

## 3. Summary of Coverage Policies and Clinical Guidelines

### **3.1 Coverage Policies**

To understand the insurance landscape for cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back and neck pain, we reviewed publicly-available coverage policies from the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), and from regional and national commercial insurers (Aetna, Anthem, Blue Shield of California [BSCA], Cigna, Health Net, Humana, Kaiser Permanente, and United HealthCare [UHC]).

CMS has a longstanding National Coverage Determination (NCD) regarding acupuncture and does not currently consider the treatment to be medically necessary.<sup>38</sup> We were unable to locate any NCDs or Local Coverage Determinations (LCDs) for CBT, MBSR, yoga, or tai chi. California's DHCS covers acupuncture and electroacupuncture for members with chronic pain resulting from a recognized medical condition. However, DHCS requires acupuncture to be sought through a Medi-Service reservation, which limits members to two total visits per month across a combination of several services (acupuncture, audiology, chiropractic, occupational therapy, podiatry, and speech therapy).<sup>39</sup> We were unable to locate any information from DHCS pertaining to the coverage of the other treatment modalities included in this review.

Six of the eight commercial plans (Aetna, BSCA, Cigna, Health Net, Kaiser Permanente, and Humana) cover acupuncture for the treatment of chronic low back and neck pain, although three insurers (Aetna, Cigna, and BSCA) note that some plans may exclude the coverage of acupuncture.<sup>40-46</sup> Anthem was the only payer included in our search that did not consider the treatment to be medically necessary.<sup>47</sup> We were unable to locate any determinations on the coverage of any of the interventions of interest from UHC.

Each of the payers that cover acupuncture require that it be provided by a licensed professional and cover a specific number of visits, which may vary across the plans offered by a given payer (Table 3.1). Kaiser Permanente requires prior authorization before coverage will be authorized, and Cigna requires a treatment plan that includes the frequency and duration of treatment. Three of the insurers (Aetna, Health Net, and Humana) require an evaluation of whether acupuncture has improved pain after several weeks to determine whether continued treatment will be authorized. Two of those plans (Aetna and Humana) allow continued treatment only if acupuncture has proven effective for the patient. Health Net allows for two additional months of treatment if acupuncture proves effective, but does not consider further treatment to be medically necessary. Four of the insurers (Aetna, Cigna, Health Net, Humana) do not cover acupuncture for maintenance care.

CBT is typically covered under the behavioral/mental health benefit (i.e., patients with depression as a result of chronic pain can be referred to a mental health practitioner who may include CBT in a treatment plan), but we were unable to locate any policies specific to the treatment of chronic low back or neck pain. With one exception, we were also unable to locate any publicly-available utilization management policies by any of the commercial insurers regarding MBSR, tai chi, or yoga, reflecting a lack of coverage for these services across payers. Cigna explicitly does not cover yoga for any indication.<sup>48</sup> Many insurers include these treatments in their wellness plans, either by offering discounts for these services to members, by providing educational material to inform individuals that these treatments may help with chronic pain, or, in one case, by offering classes open to members and non-members.

Among the insurers that offer wellness programs, two insurers (BSCA and Health Net) provide discounts for members seeking acupuncture outside of their standard coverage.<sup>49,50</sup> BSCA also provides an online portal through which members may purchase yoga and tai chi courses and materials. Kaiser Permanente was the only surveyed payer that offered wellness program services specifically addressing chronic pain. We were unable to find any information on how the other insurers' wellness programs incorporate these treatments for chronic low back and neck pain.

Kaiser Permanente offers courses to members and non-members as a branch of their wellness program.<sup>51</sup> Courses include mindfulness meditation, which includes gentle yoga aimed at coping with pain, and tai chi to reduce pain.<sup>52,53</sup> Both are offered to members and non-members for a fee, with the fee for non-members being slightly greater. Other courses, such as "Managing Chronic Pain" are available only to plan members.<sup>54</sup>

**Table 3.1. Representative Public and Private Payer Policies for Acupuncture**

Criteria	Medi-Cal	Aetna	Anthem	Cigna	Humana	UHC	BSCA	Health Net	Kaiser Permanente
<b>Covered?</b>	Yes	Yes	No	Some plans	Yes	--	Some plans	Yes	Yes
<b>Prior Authorization?</b>	No	No	No	No	No	--	No	No	Yes
<b>Number and/or Timeframe of Allowed Sessions</b>	Two services per month	Four weeks, reauthorization for additional visits if effective	--	Varies between plans	Five treatments, reauthorization for additional visits if effective	--	Varies between plans	Six treatments over one month, reauthorization for six additional visits over subsequent 2 months if effective	--

BSCA: Blue Shield of California, UHC: United HealthCare



## 3.2 Clinical Guidelines

To better understand the perspective of clinical specialty societies on the appropriate use of cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back and neck pain, we reviewed guideline statements issued by selected US and ex-US organizations. For the purposes of this report, we have focused on statements pertaining to the five included interventions.

### **The American College of Physicians (ACP) / American Pain Society (APS), 2007, 2017<sup>7,55</sup>**

The American College of Physicians (ACP) and American Pain Society (APS) Joint Recommendation in 2007 summarized the available evidence for management of acute, subacute, and chronic pain. In 2017, the ACP issued an update to these guidelines that was determined by the results of a systematic review conducted by the AHRQ.

Nonpharmacologic treatments including but not limited to acupuncture, CBT, MBSR, yoga, and tai chi are recommended as first-line treatments for patients with non-specific chronic low back pain, although there are no head to head comparisons of these interventions with pharmacologic therapy. The ACP considered the strength of this recommendation to be “strong,” meaning that the “benefits clearly outweigh risks and burden, or risks and burden clearly outweigh benefits.” The recommendation for MBSR was informed by a moderate-quality evidence base, while tai chi, yoga, acupuncture, and CBT were supported by low-quality evidence.

Clinicians may recommend the use of NSAIDs for patients who have an inadequate response to nonpharmacologic therapy, though they should recommend the lowest effective dose for the shortest time period possible given NSAIDs’ potential gastrointestinal and renal risks. Tramadol, an opioid, or duloxetine are to be considered only for patients who have unsuccessfully attempted treatment with nonpharmacologic therapy and for whom the potential benefits outweigh the considerable risks. Other opioids should only be considered the last treatment option in patients for whom other therapies have not proved successful.

### **American Academy of Pain Medicine (AAPM), 2009<sup>56</sup>**

The AAPM lists the Chronic Pain Medical Treatment Guidelines by the Division of Worker’s Compensation through California’s Department of Industrial Relations as recommended guidelines for the treatment of chronic pain.

The guidelines recommend using a biopsychosocial model for chronic pain conditions, which includes an evaluation of potential psychosocial factors of chronic pain in addition to historical and physical patient evaluation.

Behavioral interventions are recommended for the treatment of general chronic pain. Patients should be screened for fear avoidance beliefs and other factors that leave them “at risk” for

delayed recovery. Exercise treatments with CBT components should be prioritized for these at-risk patients instead of exercise alone, and clinicians should consider a separate referral to CBT if patients do not experience improvement in pain and disability after four weeks. In general, it is recommended that clinicians follow a stepped care approach to incorporating CBT into treatment regimens for chronic pain, starting with patient education for self-management of pain with MBSR, potential referral to group or individual treatment with a CBT specialist, and finally intensive care in a multidisciplinary setting. Biofeedback is also recommended as a complement to CBT programs.

The guidelines also recommend psychological therapies as complementary to opioid treatment; mindfulness meditation is suggested along with relaxation, acceptance, and distraction as tools to increase self-management of pain simultaneous to opioid use.

Yoga is recommended only as an option for a subset of patients who are identified as highly-motivated. The guidelines recommend approval where yoga is requested by a specific patient, as outcomes of depression and disability are dependent on motivation level of patient.

Acupuncture and electroacupuncture should be used as a treatment either alone or in conjunction with physical rehabilitation, post-surgical intervention, or a decrease in pain medication.

### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2016<sup>57</sup>**

The CDC developed a guideline for safe and effective opioid prescription that states increased coverage for nonpharmacologic treatments could be one tool in improving patient health and safety surrounding chronic pain and the opioid crisis. The CDC recommends the first-line use of nonpharmacologic and non-opioid pharmacologic (NSAIDs, acetaminophen, etc.) treatments in comparison to long-term opioid therapy, particularly given their relative reduction in harms, for patients with general chronic pain. While nonpharmacologic therapies are a first-line treatment option for patients with chronic low back pain, the CDC stresses that adherence to a stepwise approach of nonpharmacologic therapies, then non-opioid pharmacologic interventions, followed by opioids is not mandatory. Clinicians should weigh the risks and benefits of these three treatment options when devising a treatment plan and prevent patients from having to use an ineffective treatment method for a prolonged period of time. Nonpharmacologic interventions can also be useful in conjunction with tapering opioid doses.

### **Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement (ICSI), 2016<sup>58</sup>**

The set of guidelines from the Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement (ICSI) was established by consensus of a working group using the best available evidence.

ICSI recommends that patients presenting with chronic pain be evaluated with a behavioral health assessment, hopefully improving treatment selection and outcomes. In addition, ICSI suggests measuring and documenting the patient's functional status, quality-of-life, and pain intensity along

with whether the patient has had previous opioid exposure and their history or current experiences with substance use disorders.

For patients with chronic pain, a multidisciplinary approach is recommended whenever possible, as ICSI believes that chronic pain is best treated with a biopsychosocial approach. ICSI also recommends psychotherapy, particularly CBT or MBSR, within or separate from a multidisciplinary setting for all patients with chronic pain. Patients should engage in active physical rehabilitation (exercise), with passive modalities such as massage or spinal manipulation only as adjunct to such a treatment plan.

**National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), United Kingdom, 2017<sup>59</sup>**

For individuals ages 16 and over with chronic pain, NICE recommends providing advice and basic education, including encouragement to continue with regular activity and pain self-management. NICE also encourages consideration of a group exercise regimen (including mind-body programs), particularly for patients with a specific flare-up of pain and taking into account patient's exercise preferences. Clinicians can also consider manual therapy in conjunction with exercise, with or without additional psychological therapy.

For pharmacologic interventions, NICE recommends oral NSAIDs for managing low back pain, although they do not recommend offering opioids for managing chronic low back pain. In patients with chronic low back pain, combined physical and psychological programs are recommended, particularly CBT programs in group settings. CBT and other psychological therapies are not recommended without concurrent exercise. Acupuncture is explicitly not recommended for managing low back pain.

## 4. Comparative Clinical Effectiveness

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### 4.1 Overview

We abstracted data on the interventions considered in this review from the AHRQ systematic review of therapies for low back pain and from subsequent randomized trials of the same interventions for patients with chronic low back pain. We focused primarily on changes in function, pain, and quality of life that persist beyond the initial treatment period by at least four weeks, but ideally for a year or more. Similarly, we abstracted data from systematic reviews of the same five interventions for chronic neck pain and from subsequent randomized trials for the same indication. Following the approach of the AHRQ review, we qualitatively synthesized information from the systematic reviews and randomized trials. Qualitative assessments were based on the consistency of the direction and magnitude of the effect size.

### 4.2 Methods

#### Data Sources and Searches

Procedures for the systematic literature review assessing the evidence on cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back and neck pain followed established best methods.<sup>60,61</sup> The review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines.<sup>62</sup> The PRISMA guidelines include a list of 27 checklist items, which are described further in Appendix Table A1.

We searched MEDLINE/PubMed, EMBASE, and the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials for relevant studies. The search was limited to English-language studies of human subjects and focused on trials of at least six month's duration or outcomes measured at least four weeks after the end of active therapy; articles indexed as guidelines, letters, editorials, narrative reviews, or news items were excluded.

The search strategies included a combination of indexing terms (MeSH terms in MEDLINE/PubMed and Emtree terms in EMBASE), as well as free-text terms, and are presented in Appendix Tables A2-A5. In order to supplement the above searches and ensure optimal and complete literature retrieval, we performed a manual check of the references of recent relevant systematic reviews and meta-analyses. We also contacted specialty societies and patient advocacy organizations to ensure that we captured all of the relevant literature.

## Study Selection

After the literature search and removal of duplicate citations using both online and local software tools (DistillerSR and Endnote X8.0.2), study selection was performed using two levels of screening, at the abstract and full-text level. Three reviewers screened the titles and abstracts of all publications identified through electronic searches per the inclusion and exclusion criteria defined by the PICOTS elements; a fourth reviewer worked with the initial three reviewers to resolve any issues of disagreement through consensus. No study was excluded at abstract-level screening due to insufficient information. For example, an abstract that did not report an outcome of interest in the abstract would be accepted for further review in full text.

Citations accepted during abstract-level screening were retrieved in full text for review. In the full text screening stage, four reviewers screened all publications using the same inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a fifth reviewer resolved any conflicts that resulted. Reasons for exclusion were categorized according to the PICOTS elements during both title/abstract and full-text review.

Key inclusion criteria included studies of at least six months' duration or that reported outcomes at least four weeks after the end of active treatment. We required that studies report pain and/or function outcomes for adults of at least 18 years of age with chronic back or neck pain treated with at least one of the interventions of interest (acupuncture, CBT, MBSR, yoga, tai chi) compared to usual care, sham therapy, or other active therapy.

## Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

For the systematic literature review, each publication was abstracted by a single reviewer, and the abstracted data was then validated for quality assurance by a different reviewer. Five total reviewers participated in data abstraction.

Information from the accepted studies was extracted into data extraction forms and summarized in Appendix Tables D3-D10.

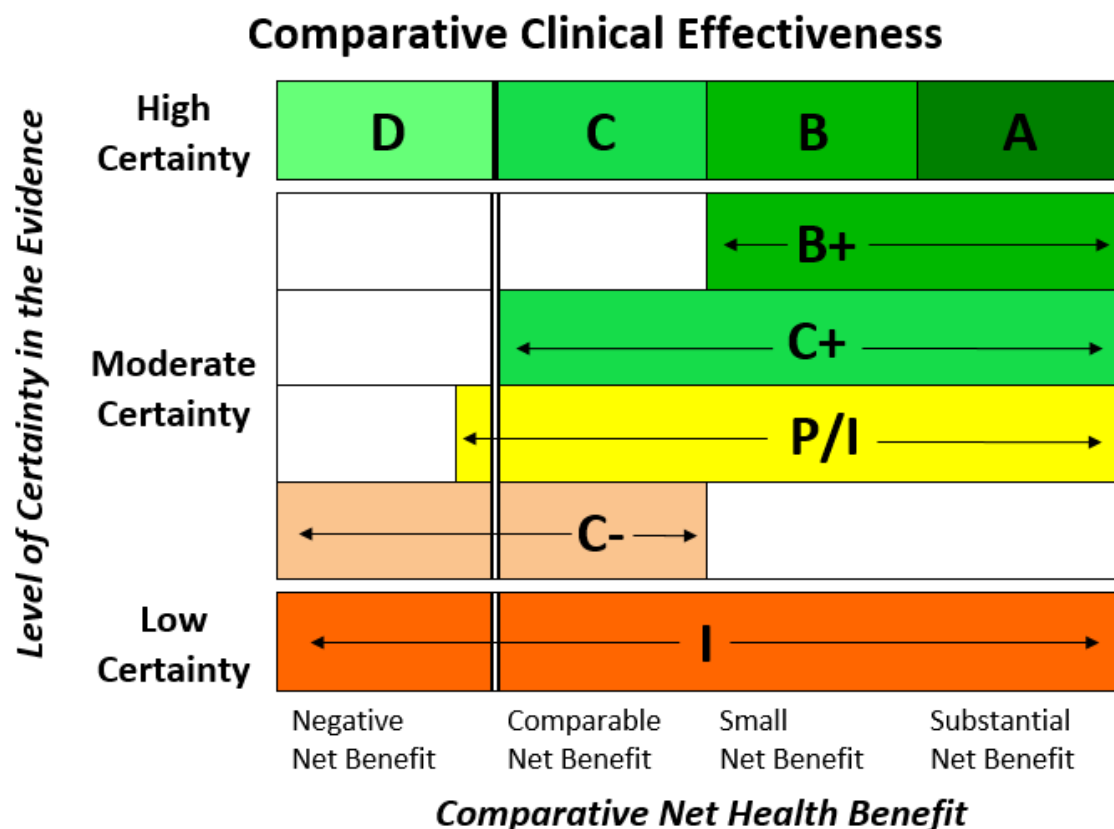
Quality assessment of randomized trials follows the AHRQ implementation of the USPSTF criteria.<sup>63</sup> Quality assessment of systematic reviews follows the Assessing the Methodological Quality of Systematic Reviews (AMSTAR) guidelines.<sup>64</sup>

## Assessment of Level of Certainty in Evidence

We used the [ICER Evidence Rating Matrix](#) (see Figure 4.1) to evaluate the evidence for a variety of outcomes. The evidence rating reflects a joint judgment of two critical components:

- a) The **magnitude** of the difference between a therapeutic agent and its comparator in “net health benefit” – the balance between clinical benefits and risks and/or adverse effects AND
- b) The level of **certainty** in the best point estimate of net health benefit.<sup>65</sup>

Figure 4.1. ICER Evidence Rating Matrix



A = "Superior" - High certainty of a substantial (moderate-large) net health benefit  
 B = "Incremental" - High certainty of a small net health benefit  
 C = "Comparable" - High certainty of a comparable net health benefit  
 D = "Negative" - High certainty of an inferior net health benefit  
 B+ = "Incremental or Better" - Moderate certainty of a small or substantial net health benefit, with high certainty of at least a small net health benefit  
 C+ = "Comparable or Better" - Moderate certainty of a comparable, small, or substantial net health benefit, with high certainty of at least a comparable net health benefit  
 P/I = "Promising but Inconclusive" - Moderate certainty of a comparable, small, or substantial net health benefit, and a small (but nonzero) likelihood of a negative net health benefit  
 C- = "Comparable or Inferior" - Moderate certainty that the point estimate for comparative net health benefit is either comparable or inferior  
 I = "Insufficient" - Any situation in which the level of certainty in the evidence is low

## Data Synthesis and Statistical Analyses

Data on relevant outcomes were summarized in Appendix Tables D6 and D10, and synthesized qualitatively below.

## 4.3 Results

The results are presented in the following order: study selection, quality of studies, benefits, harms, controversies and uncertainties, and summary. In each section, we first review chronic low back pain and then chronic neck pain. Within each indication, we evaluated five cognitive and mind-body interventions in the following order: acupuncture, cognitive behavioral therapy, mindfulness based stress reduction, yoga, and tai chi. In the benefits section for each intervention, we begin by summarizing a key trial and then present the summary estimates on key outcomes from systematic reviews and additional randomized trials published after the systematic reviews. Key trials are the larger, higher-quality trials with longer follow-up for each intervention.

### Study Selection

The literature search identified 472 citations (Appendix Figure A1). After reviewing the titles and abstracts, 143 full-text articles were evaluated. Of the 36 total references that were included, 24 were systematic reviews and 12 reported on randomized trials. Four systematic reviews of cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic neck pain were identified to complement the AHRQ review<sup>9</sup> of therapies for low back pain.<sup>66-69</sup> These were the most recent, high-quality reviews for each of the five interventions in the scope of our review. Two of the systematic reviews looked for trials of tai chi and yoga for neck pain and did not identify any randomized trials meeting their inclusion criteria.<sup>67,69</sup> Since our inclusion criteria differed from that of the AHRQ review for chronic low back pain and the four systematic reviews of therapies for chronic neck pain, we reviewed the randomized trials included within these systematic reviews to determine if they met our specifications. Specifically, we only included studies of at least six month's duration or studies of a more limited duration with outcomes assessed at least four weeks after cessation of active therapy. From the AHRQ review,<sup>9</sup> we included 24 studies on acupuncture, CBT, yoga, tai chi and mindfulness. From the systematic reviews identified for chronic neck pain, we included six studies from two reviews on acupuncture and five studies from one review on CBT. The full list of included and excluded studies from these previous systematic reviews is available in Appendix Table D1 and D2.

We identified eight publications describing seven new randomized trials meeting our inclusion criteria for low back pain<sup>12,70-75</sup> that have been published since the search performed for the AHRQ review. We also identified four trials for chronic neck pain<sup>76-79</sup> that met our inclusion criteria and were not included in prior systematic reviews. Details of the studies are summarized in Appendix Tables D3-6.

## Quality of Individual Studies

### Chronic Low Back Pain

#### ***Systematic Review***

The AHRQ review of low back pain<sup>9</sup> was a high-quality systematic review. It met all 11 of the AMSTAR criteria.

#### ***New Randomized Trials***

Six additional randomized trials were identified. There was one pilot trial of a mindfulness intervention with poor comparability of participants at baseline, lack of blinding, and poor reporting of key outcomes.<sup>75</sup> The remaining four trials all evaluated yoga: three were good quality<sup>73,74,80</sup> and one fair quality.<sup>70</sup> The fair quality trial was downgraded for differential loss to follow-up (12% for yoga and 30% for the other two arms).

### Chronic Neck Pain

#### ***Systematic Reviews***

The quality of the systematic reviews of interventions for chronic neck pain were more heterogeneous (Appendix Table D9). The two systematic reviews of acupuncture for neck pain were of high quality, meeting 10 of the 11 AMSTAR criteria, with one review not reporting any assessment for publication bias<sup>68</sup> and one review not stating whether an *a priori* design was used.<sup>69</sup> The systematic review of CBT was also high quality.<sup>66</sup> The systematic review that looked for RCTs of yoga was of low quality and did not find any trials meeting their inclusion and exclusion criteria.<sup>67</sup>

#### ***New Randomized Trials***

Four additional randomized controlled trials were identified in the chronic neck pain population that met our inclusion criteria. One new study of acupuncture was judged to be of low quality due to significant baseline difference and significant loss to follow-up.<sup>81</sup> The other two new studies of acupuncture were of fair quality.<sup>78,79</sup> One RCT looked at the effect of tai chi compared to conventional neck exercise and waitlist control. While the study was powered to detect differences between the arms, the study was only of fair quality due to low adherence rates in the neck exercise group.<sup>77</sup>



## Clinical Benefits

The most important benefit to patients is improvement in function (i.e., a greater ability to work and do their desired daily activities) even if they still have pain. The next most important benefit is a reduction in pain. If achieved, these should translate into improved quality of life. We summarize the magnitude of these effects in the clinical trials using the following table derived from the AHRQ review as a guide.<sup>9</sup> There is no consensus in the literature on the magnitude of a difference in pain or function on these scales that is clinically significant, but one group has made proposals based on a review of the literature.<sup>35</sup>

**Table 4.1. Magnitude of Effect Based on Average Between-Group Differences\***

Outcome	Slight / Small Improvement	Moderate Improvement	Large / Substantial Improvement
<b>Function</b>	5-10 points on the ODI or NDI 1-2 points on the RMDQ	>10-20 points on the ODI or NDI >2-5 points on the RMDQ	>20 points on the ODI or NDI >5 points on the RMDQ
<b>Pain</b>	0.5-1.0 points on 10-point VAS	>1.0-2.0 points on 10-point VAS	>2.0 points on 10-point VAS
<b>Pain or Function</b>	0.2-0.5 SMD	>0.5-0.8 SMD	>0.8 SMD

ODI =Oswestry Disability Index; NDI = Neck Disability Index; VAS = Visual Analog Scale; SMD = Standardized Mean Difference

\*Based on Table 1 in the AHRQ Systematic Review performed for the ACP<sup>9</sup>

## Chronic Low Back Pain

### Acupuncture

There were no new trials published since the AHRQ review.<sup>9</sup> Their primary findings for the use of acupuncture for chronic low back pain are summarized after the key trial below, emphasizing outcomes assessed at least four weeks after the end of active treatment.

#### Key Trial: Cherkin 2009

Cherkin 2009 was chosen as the key trial representing acupuncture for low back pain because it is the largest trial of acupuncture with the longest follow-up.<sup>11</sup> It provided unique insights because the investigators compared standardized acupuncture not only to sham acupuncture, but also to individualized acupuncture and to usual care. It was a good quality trial with appropriate randomization and allocation concealment, no important differences between groups at baseline, and good follow-up (91%) at the 26- and 52-week follow-up visits with no differential lost to follow-up. The primary outcomes were assessed by telephone interviewers who were unaware of the randomization status of the patients. Finally, a strict intention to treat analysis was performed.

The investigators randomized 638 adults with chronic low back pain to one of four arms: individualized acupuncture, standardized acupuncture, sham acupuncture, and usual care. Participants randomized to real or sham acupuncture were treated twice weekly for three weeks and then weekly for four weeks, for a total of 10 treatments. In the individualized acupuncture group, a diagnostician prescribed treatment at the beginning of each session, with no constraints placed on the number of needles, depth of insertion, or needle manipulation. Participants assigned to standardized acupuncture received a standardized prescription for low back pain that included eight insertion points on the low back and lower leg; acupuncture points were needled for 20 minutes, and needles were twirled at 10 minutes and prior to removal for stimulation. Sham acupuncture followed the same procedure by placing a standard acupuncture needle guide tube against the skin and touching eight standardized acupuncture points with a toothpick. Participants assigned to usual care followed the care their physicians selected, which consisted largely of medication, primary care, and physical therapy; all participants also received a self-care book containing information on management of flare-ups, exercise, and lifestyle modification. The primary outcomes were back-related dysfunction (RMDQ score; range, 0-23) and symptom bothersomeness (0-10 scale).

The participants had a mean age of 47 years, 62% female, and 68% reporting low back pain for more than one year at baseline. At 26 weeks, participants receiving real or sham acupuncture were more likely to experience a clinically-meaningful improvement ( $\geq 3$ -point improvement) on the dysfunction scale than those receiving usual care (58-62% vs. 44%;  $p=0.01$ ; mean score 6.4-6.8 vs. 8.4), although statistical differences were not detected between the individualized, standardized, and sham acupuncture groups. These improvements were maintained at 52 weeks. For both the individualized and standardized acupuncture groups, the average RMDQ score decreased from 10.8 at baseline to 6.0 at 52 weeks; for the sham acupuncture group, the RMDQ score decreased from 9.8 to 6.2 and for the usual care group from 11.0 to 7.9. The average decrease in the RMDQ score compared to usual care was significant at one year ( $p<0.05$ ) for the individualized and standardized acupuncture, but not for the simulated acupuncture. The reduction in symptom bothersomeness was significantly greater in the standard and simulated acupuncture groups compared to usual care at both 26 and 52 weeks (0.6 points for both at 52 weeks). There was a trend toward a greater reduction in symptom bothersomeness for the individualized acupuncture group that was significant at eight weeks, but no longer significant at 26 and 52 weeks (0.45 points at 52 weeks).

Adverse events were reported by 4% of participants in each of the individualized and standardized acupuncture groups and 0% of the other groups. The adverse events were primarily short-term increases in pain, with one severe increase in pain lasting for a month.

### Reduction in Disability / Improvement in Function

The AHRQ review found that acupuncture – whether standardized or sham – was associated with better function (standardized mean difference [SMD] -0.94, 95% confidence interval [CI] -1.4 to -0.47) compared to no acupuncture immediately following treatment. However, the improvement in function was no longer significant after one year of follow-up. There were no significant differences in functional improvements when acupuncture was compared with sham acupuncture.

Acupuncture was associated with better function compared with medications (SMD -0.36, 95% CI -0.67 to -0.04) immediately following treatment, but no long-term follow-up data were available.

Eleven trials in the AHRQ review met our inclusion criteria (outcomes measured at least four weeks after the end of treatment or at least six months of treatment) and six of them reported on function. The change in disability measured by the RMDQ ranged from -0.8 to +2.3 points compared with usual care with positive numbers representing greater improvement. This range of results was overall consistent with the findings of the AHRQ review. One trial reported on changes in disability compared with sham acupuncture; the difference was +0.7 points at 6 months and +1.2 points at one year.

### Reduction in Pain

The AHRQ review reported that acupuncture was associated with lower pain intensity (SMD -0.72, 95% CI -0.94 to -0.49) compared to no acupuncture immediately after the intervention. The reduction in pain was no longer significant in the long term (at least one year of follow-up).

Acupuncture also reduced pain more than sham acupuncture immediately after the intervention (WMD -1.7, 95% CI -3.3 to -0.2 on 10-point VAS) and through 12 weeks of follow-up (WMD -0.95, 95% CI -1.6 to -0.3). Acupuncture was also associated with lower pain intensity compared with medications (WMD -1.1, 95% CI -2.0 to -0.10) in the short term.

In the 11 trials meeting our inclusion criteria, the change in pain measured by the 10-point VAS ranged from -0.6 to +3.0 points compared with usual care and -0.1 to +2.4 points at one year compared with sham acupuncture. This range of results was overall consistent with the findings of the AHRQ review.

### Other reported benefits

No other benefits were described.

**Table 4.2. Key Outcomes from AHRQ Systematic Review of Acupuncture for Chronic Low Back Pain**

	Short-Term Function	Short-Term Pain	Long-Term Function	Long-Term Pain
<b>Acupuncture vs. Usual Care</b>	SMD -0.94 (-1.41 to -0.47)	SMD -0.72 (-0.94 to -0.49)	Two trials reported small or no differences	Two trials reported small or no differences
<b>Acupuncture vs. Sham Acupuncture</b>	No difference	WMD -1.7 (-3.3 to -0.02)	No data	No data
<b>Acupuncture vs. Medicines</b>	SMD -0.36 (-0.67 to -0.04)	WMD -1.1 (-2.0 to -0.08)	No data	No data

### ***Cognitive Behavioral Therapy***

The AHRQ review included five RCTs from a prior systematic review, two of which met our inclusion criteria. Three studies within the AHRQ review that assessed CBT plus another form of treatment versus the other treatment alone also met our inclusion criteria. One head-to-head study comparing CBT to MBSR and usual care met our criteria. We found one additional publication that reported 24 months follow-up for one of the included trials and is described in detail below.

#### Key trial: *Cherkin 2016*

Cherkin 2016 was chosen as the key trial representing both cognitive behavioral therapy and mindfulness based stress reduction because it was the largest trial of both with the longest follow-up.<sup>12</sup> It also was the only trial directly comparing two of the interventions of interest in our review. It was a fair quality trial with appropriate randomization, allocation concealment, and no important differences between groups at baseline. Follow-up was acceptable at the 52 week (85%) and 104 week (81%) follow-up visits with greater follow-up in the usual care group (94% at 52 weeks). A strict intention to treat analysis was performed.

In this three-arm interviewer-blind RCT, 342 adults with chronic low back pain were randomized to CBT, MBSR, or usual care.<sup>12</sup> All participants continued to receive medical care that they were otherwise receiving prior to trial enrollment. However, patients in the usual care arm could seek any additional treatment that they desired. Both CBT and MBSR were delivered in group format for two hours per week for eight weeks, with an optional six-hour retreat offered to patients in the MBSR arm. Additionally, patients in the CBT and MBSR arms were given materials and instructions to practice the interventions at home.

The co-primary outcomes were clinically meaningful improvements in the RMDQ score and 10-point pain bothersomeness scores. A 30% reduction in both the RMDQ score and the back pain bothersomeness scale were considered clinically meaningful.

The baseline characteristics were similar in all three arms with a mean age of 49 years, 66% female, and 80% reporting low back pain for more than one year. At 26 weeks, 57.7% of participants reported clinically-meaningful improvement in RMDQ results in the CBT arm, 60.5% in the MBSR group and 44.1% in the usual care group. Similar findings were observed at 52 weeks. The comparison between active treatment and usual care was statistically significant for CBT at 26 weeks only and for MBSR at 26 and 52 weeks. At 104 weeks, the proportion of patients with clinically-meaningful improvement was 62.0% for the CBT group, 55.4% for the MBSR group, and 42% for the usual care group, which was not statistically significant. The average between-group difference in the RMDQ was significant for CBT versus usual care at 104 weeks, but not for MBSR versus usual care or CBT versus MBSR.<sup>71</sup>

For pain bothersomeness, patients in the CBT and MBSR groups had a greater proportion of patients with clinically-meaningful improvements than those receiving usual care at 26 weeks (44.9% CBT, 43.6% MBSR, and 26.6% usual care). At 52 weeks, the between-group comparison was only significant for MBSR (39.6% CBT, 48.5% MBSR, and 31.0% usual care). No significant difference was observed between the three groups at 104 weeks (39.6% CBT, 41.2% MBSR, and 31.1% usual care).

The study evaluated a number of other outcomes in addition to disability and pain bothersomeness. CBT significantly reduced depression compared with usual care at 26 months, but not 52 weeks. CBT also significantly reduced anxiety at 26 weeks compared with both usual care and MBSR. Both CBT and MBSR reduced pain intensity more than usual care at 26 weeks and 52 weeks with no significant differences comparing CBT to MBSR. Finally, CBT significantly improved quality of life assessed by the SF-12 Mental Health Component Score at 26 weeks, but not 52 weeks.

Adherence to CBT and MBSR was low in the trial. Among those randomized to CBT or MBSR 89% attended at least one session, but only 57% of patients randomized to CBT and 51% of patients randomized to MBSR attended at least six of the eight sessions and only 26% attended the six-hour MBSR retreat. The findings from the study should be interpreted with caution as the extent to which adherence issues adversely impacted the results is unknown. Follow-up for outcomes was higher (85% at 52 weeks and 81% at 104 weeks).

Adverse events were reported by 10% of participants attending at least one CBT session and 29% of patients attending at least one MBSR session. The adverse events were primarily a temporary increase in pain during progressive relaxation for the CBT group and a temporary increase in pain with yoga in the MBSR group. No serious adverse events were reported.

#### Reduction in Disability / Improvement in Function

Overall, the AHRQ review found that CBT was not associated with improved function based on a prior 2010 Cochrane review. Three trials assessed this outcome and met our inclusion criteria. Two

of these trials (including the key trial discussed above) compared CBT to either advice or usual care and reported significant improvements in function on the RMDQ of 1.4 and 1.5 points at six months and 1.3 points in both trials at one year. These results were consistent with the findings of the AHRQ review. In one trial, when CBT was added to physical therapy, the RMDQ was worse in the CBT group at six months (-0.6 points) and at one year (-1.2 points) compared with physical therapy alone.

Reduction in Pain

The AHRQ review found that CBT was associated with lower pain intensity (SMD -0.60, 95% CI -0.94 to -0.49) compared with usual care. However, among the three trials meeting our inclusion criteria, when CBT was added to either relaxation therapy or physical therapy, CBT was associated with higher pain intensity at six months (-0.5 and -1.3 points) and at one year (-0.8 points in both trials). The key trial<sup>12,7112,7112,7012,7012,70</sup> described above used a pain bothersomeness 10-point scale rather than a pain intensity scale.<sup>12,71</sup> In that trial, there was a greater improvement in pain bothersomeness in the CBT group compared with the usual care group at one year (+0.8), but not at two years (+0.5), which was consistent with the findings of the AHRQ review.

Other reported benefits

No other benefits were described in the AHRQ review, but the key trial reported that patients randomized to CBT had significant reductions in depression on the PHQ-8 and anxiety on the GAD-2 at eight and 26 weeks. Similarly, they reported significant improvements on the Physical Component Score and the Mental Component Score of the SF-12 quality of life instrument at weeks eight and 26. At 52 weeks, only the depression and pain intensity scores remained statistically significant.

**Table 4.3. Key Outcomes from AHRQ Systematic Review of CBT for Chronic Low Back Pain**

	Short-Term Function	Short-Term Pain	Long-Term Function	Long-Term Pain
CBT vs. Usual Care	No difference	SMD -0.60 (-0.97 to -0.22)	Not reported	Not reported

CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy

***Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction***

The AHRQ review included three trials of MBSR for chronic low back pain, but performed no meta-analysis. Our search identified one small, new publication,<sup>75</sup> and a second which reported 24-month follow-up on one of the three trials in the AHRQ review.<sup>71</sup>

### Key trial: Cherkin 2016

Please refer to the Key Trial in the CBT section above. The trial compared MBSR to CBT and to usual care.<sup>12,71</sup>

### Reduction in Disability / Improvement in Function

The key trial described above<sup>12,71</sup> reported a significant improvement in function of 1.4 points on the 24-point RMDQ at 26 weeks compared with usual care that increased to 1.9 points at 52 weeks. This corresponded to 60% of patients in the MBSR group with a clinically-meaningful improvement in function at 26 weeks and 69% at 52 weeks, compared with 44% and 49% respectively in the usual care group. At 104 weeks, the difference was no longer statistically significant (1.3 points, 55% vs. 42%).

The second good-quality trial in the AHRQ review reported significant improvements in function at eight weeks compared to an educational intervention (-1.1 points on RMDQ, 95% CI -2.1 to -0.01), but the difference was no longer significant at six months.<sup>72</sup> The third study in the AHRQ review was a small (n=40), poor quality pilot trial by the same author that reported improvements in function (RMDQ) compared to an educational intervention that were larger at four months follow-up than at the end of the active treatment phase, but did not reach statistical significance.<sup>82</sup>

The new study was a pilot trial that enrolled 35 patients on chronic opioid therapy (average morphine equivalents 148 mg/day) and compared an eight-week MBSR intervention to a wait list usual care control.<sup>75</sup> There were significant baseline differences between the study groups ( $p < 0.001$  for pain intensity, for example), so the study was of poor quality. There was no significant between-group difference in the ODI at 26 weeks follow-up.

All four studies met our inclusion criteria, but only two reported functional outcomes after six months or longer. At six months, the improvement was 0.4 in one trial and 1.4 in the other, increasing to 1.6 at 12 months, but decreasing to 1.3 at 24 months, which was consistent with the findings of the AHRQ review.

### Reduction in Pain

The key trial described above<sup>12,71</sup> reported significant reductions in pain intensity on a 10-point VAS at 26 weeks (-0.64 points) and at 52 weeks (-0.85 points) and in pain bothersomeness at 26 weeks (-1.4 points on a 10-point scale) and 52 weeks (-1.9 points). The other two trials in the AHRQ review did not report significant improvements in pain compared to the control group.<sup>72,82</sup> The poor-quality RCT among patients on high-dose opioid therapy found no significant between-group differences in pain intensity at 26 weeks.<sup>75</sup>



### Other Reported Benefits

No other benefits were described in the AHRQ review, but the key trial reported that patients randomized to MBSR had significant reductions in depression on the PHQ-8 and significant improvements on the Mental Component Score of the SF-12 quality of life instrument at eight weeks. These were no longer significant at 26 and 52 weeks and the GAD-2 and SF-12 Physical Component Score were never statistically significant.

**Table 4.4. Key Outcomes from AHRQ Systematic Review of MBSR for Chronic Low Back Pain**

	Short-Term Function	Short-Term Pain	Long-Term Function	Long-Term Pain
<b>MBSR vs. Usual Care</b>	RMDQ -1.4 (-2.5 to -0.2)	-0.6 (-1.1 to -0.1)	RMDQ -1.9 (-3.1 to -0.6)	-0.8 (-1.4 to -0.3)
<b>MBSR vs. Education</b>	RMDQ -1.1 (-2.1 to -0.01)	No significant difference	No data	No data

MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction, RMDQ: Roland Morris Disability Questionnaire

### **Yoga**

The AHRQ review included 14 trials of yoga for chronic low back pain, 10 from a prior systematic review. Eight of the 10 trials in the systematic review were rated as having a low risk of bias and two of the new trials were rated as fair quality and two as good quality. We identified four additional trials with longer-term outcomes.

#### Key Trial: Saper 2017

Saper 2017 was chosen as the key trial representing yoga because it was the largest trial of yoga with the longest follow-up.<sup>73</sup> However, it's quality was rated as poor because of baseline differences between groups, lack of blinding and differential loss to follow-up (physical therapy group had larger loss to follow-up, but yoga and education groups were similar. The final analysis adjusted for baseline differences between groups.

In this three-arm single-blind randomized non-inferiority trial, 320 adults aged 18 to 64 years with non-specific chronic low back pain were enrolled and randomized to yoga, physical therapy, and education in a 2:2:1 ratio.<sup>73</sup> The researchers conducted the study in a large academic safety-net hospital and seven federally-qualified community health centers in racially diverse neighborhoods. The study design consisted of two phases, a 12-week treatment phase and 40-week maintenance phase.

The aim in the treatment phase was to determine if yoga was not inferior to physical therapy for improving function and pain in the lower back. Secondly, Saper and colleagues aimed to determine if yoga and physical therapy were both better at improving function than education. The



maintenance phase split the two active arms of yoga and physical therapy into four groups, randomly assigning participants to yoga drop-in classes, yoga at home, physical therapy booster sessions, and physical therapy at home. The education group remained unchanged during this phase. At 52 weeks, the researchers evaluated whether both yoga drop-in classes and physical therapy booster sessions were superior to their respective at-home practices.

The yoga sessions included 12 weekly 75-minute classes, adapted from previous studies and input from yoga experts. Maintenance phase classes had a higher participant-instructor ratio (8:1 as opposed to 5:1 in the treatment phase), but were otherwise structured similarly. Participants in physical therapy attended 15 60-minute appointments for 12 weeks. The protocol consisted of treatment-based classification, graded exercise, and screening for fear-avoidance beliefs. Booster session participants were requested to meet with physical therapist at months four, six, eight, 10, and 12. At-home participants received instructions and supplies and reported the number of exercises performed daily. Education participants received a help book and newsletters previously used by other trials with information on self-management of chronic low back pain. During data collection, entry, and analysis, the assessors were masked. The primary outcomes were change from baseline to 12 weeks in RMDQ scores for function and in pain scores on an 11-point pain scale (0 = no pain and 10 = worst pain).

Participants had a mean age of 46 years and 64% were female. There were baseline differences in RMDQ, sex, and body mass index ( $p < 0.1$ ), which were adjusted for in the analyses. At 12 weeks, the change in the mean RMDQ score was -3.8 for the yoga group [95% CI, -4.6 to -2.9], -3.5 for the physical therapy group [95% CI -4.5 to -2.6]), and -2.5 for the education group (95% CI -3.8 to -1.3). None of the between-group differences were significant. The mean difference in RMDQ scores was -0.26. At 12 weeks, the change in the mean pain score was -1.7 for the yoga group (95% CI, -2.1 to -1.4), -2.3 for the physical therapy group (95% CI -2.7 to -1.9), and -1.4 for the education group (95% CI -3.8 to -1.3). Physical therapy had a significant reduction in pain compared to the education group (-0.84, 95% CI -1.5 to -0.2). The differences in pain reduction between the yoga group and the other two groups were not significant.

The investigators defined a clinically-meaningful responses as a 30% reduction in the score for both the RMDQ and the pain intensity VAS, which mirrored the recommendations of other groups.<sup>35</sup> The proportion of patients who achieved a clinically-meaningful reduction in the RMDQ at 12 weeks was 48% for the yoga group, 37% for the physical therapy group, and 23% for the education group. The proportion of patients achieving a clinically-meaningful reduction in pain at 12 weeks was 35% for the yoga group, 42% for the physical therapy group, and 25% for the education group.

There were no significant differences in function or pain comparing yoga drop-in classes to yoga home practice during the maintenance phase through 52 weeks. Similarly, there were no significant differences in function or pain comparing physical therapy booster sessions to physical therapy home practice during the maintenance phase through 52 weeks. The investigators did not

compare outcomes between the yoga, physical therapy, and education groups at 52 weeks in this publication, although they conclude that “the improvements in yoga and PT were maintained at one year.”

Secondary outcomes were self-reported pain medication use in previous week, global improvement (seven-point scale from extremely worsened to extremely improved), patient satisfaction with interventions, and health-related quality of life using the SF-36 questionnaire. Yoga and physical therapy participants were 21% and 22% less likely than patients in the education group to use pain medication. The only significantly-important difference observed in self-rated global improvement and satisfaction was between physical therapy and education. There were no significant differences for SF-36 scores between groups. The limitations of this study included low participation rates in all three of the interventions (less than 50% met attendance goals in each) and a disproportionate loss to follow-up within the physical therapy group.

Adverse events were more common in the active treatment groups (yoga 7%, physical therapy 11%, education 2%). The most common were joint pain and increased back pain (21/23 reported events). There was one serious adverse event in the yoga group: hospitalization for wrist swelling at the site of a wrist fracture that had been treated surgically prior to the trial. The patient was diagnosed with cellulitis and treated successfully with antibiotics.

#### Reduction in Disability / Improvement in Function

One trial in the AHRQ review compared yoga with usual care; yoga was associated with a significant improvement in function at 24 weeks (3 points on the ODI). In five trials compared to exercise, yoga was usually associated with better function, but the differences were small and not always statistically significant. Finally, in five trials compared with education, yoga was associated with better function in the short term (SMD -0.45, 95% CI -0.65 to -0.25) and long term (SMD -0.39, 95% CI -0.66 to -0.11). Among the two trials meeting our inclusion criteria reporting functional outcomes, there was a 0.4 point increase in the RMDQ versus education at three months,<sup>73</sup> but a 2.5 point greater improvement in the RMDQ with yoga compared to usual care at six months.<sup>80</sup>

#### Reduction in Pain

In the AHRQ review, the only trial that compared yoga with usual care reported a significant reduction in pain at 24 weeks (1.3 points on the VAS). In five trials compared to exercise, yoga was usually associated with decreased pain, but the differences were small and not always statistically significant. Finally, in five trials compared with education, yoga was associated with reduced pain in the short term (SMD -0.45, 95% CI -0.63 to -0.26), but the difference was smaller and not significant with long term follow-up. For the four trials meeting our inclusion criteria, the differences in pain between the yoga and control groups at six months ranged from -0.6 to +0.6 that was overall consistent with the AHRQ review.

### Other Reported Benefits

No other benefits were reported except as described in the key trial above.

**Table 4.5. Key Outcomes from AHRQ Systematic Review of Yoga for Chronic Low Back Pain**

	Short-Term Function	Short-Term Pain	Long-Term Function	Long-Term Pain
<b>Yoga vs. Usual Care</b>	ODI -3, p<0.01	VAS -1.3, p<0.01	Not reported	Not reported
<b>Yoga vs. Exercise</b>	Better function, small difference	Less pain, small difference	Not reported	Not reported
<b>Yoga vs. Education</b>	SMD -0.45 (-0.65 to -0.25)	SMD -0.45 (-0.63 to -0.26)	SMD -0.39 (-0.66 to -0.11)	Not significant

ODI: Oswestry Disability Index, SMD: standardized mean difference, VAS: visual analog scale

### ***Tai Chi***

The AHRQ review summarized two fair-quality trials that randomized 480 participants to tai chi or usual care. Our search did not identify any additional trials of tai chi that met our inclusion criteria.

#### Key Trial: Weifen 2013

The key trial is the largest of the two trials of tai chi, but only followed participants for six months.<sup>83</sup> AHRQ rated this as a fair quality trial, though the reporting in the publication did not follow the CONSORT criteria, so assessment of trial quality was challenging. The trial studied a unique population, retired Chinese athletes, who were younger than participants in most of the other trials, so the results may not generalize to Americans with chronic low back pain.

In this double-blind RCT in Fujian, China, 320 patients were randomized to practice tai chi (n=141), backwards walking (n=47), jogging (n=47), swimming (n=38), or no exercise (n=47) for six months. Participants were retired athletes between the ages of 20 and 45 years with non-specific chronic low back pain confined to the lumbar vertebrae of one to five years' duration. Patients' average pain intensity over the last week had to exceed 4 mm on a 10 mm VAS to be eligible for inclusion, and they had to have not participated in any physical treatments in the three months prior to the trial. Patients were instructed to refrain from their regular athletic routines for the duration of the study.

All participants received physical treatment throughout the trial, including electrotherapy, traditional Chinese manipulation, traction, and massage. Additionally, patients received acupuncture and spinal manipulation along with basic advice on healthy lifestyle habits. In the tai chi group, participants were instructed to practice four cycles of the 24-step Chen style tai chi exercises for 45 minutes each day, five days per week. Participants in the jogging, backwards

walking, and swimming groups were instructed to practice their respective exercises for 30 minutes each day after a 15-minute warm-up exercise routine, five days per week.

The primary outcome was pain intensity score on a VAS from 0 to 10 mm, assessed at three months and again at six months immediately after cessation of treatment. Medical examinations assessing body mass index, heart rate, blood pressure, and daily sleep habits were also performed at baseline and three and six months.

The groups were comparable at baseline with mean age of 38 years, 40% female, and an average duration of 2.1 years of back pain. At six months, patients in the tai chi group had a mean VAS pain score of 2.2, a 3.0-point improvement from baseline. There was no statistically-significant difference between the tai chi and swimming groups ( $p>0.05$ ). There were significant differences reported for tai chi compared with backwards walking, jogging, and no exercise ( $p<0.05$  for each). The between-group difference in pain comparing tai chi to no exercise at six months was 1.0 points ( $p<0.01$ , no confidence interval given). No functional outcomes or adverse events were reported.

#### Reduction in Disability / Improvement in Function

Only one of the two trials reported on function. It found a greater improvement in function with tai chi on the RMDQ (2.6 points, 95% CI 1.1 to 3.7) at the end of the 10-week program. The trial did not follow participants beyond 10 weeks, so there are no studies reporting significant long-term improvements in function.

#### Reduction in Pain

Both studies reported that tai chi reduced pain compared to no active treatment at the end of active treatment: (0.9 and 1.3 points respectively on a 10-point VAS). Only one trial reported outcomes at six months: a reduction of 1.0 points.

#### Other Reported Benefits

No other benefits were reported.

**Table 4.6. Key Outcomes from AHRQ Systematic Review of Tai Chi for Chronic Low Back Pain**

	Short-Term Function	Short-Term Pain	Long-Term Function	Long-Term Pain
<b>Tai Chi vs. Wait List</b>	RMDQ -2.6 (-3.7 to -1.1)	VAS -0.9	Not reported	Not reported
<b>Tai Chi vs. No Tai Chi</b>	Not reported	VAS -1.3	Not reported	Not reported

RMDQ: Roland Morris Disability Questionnaire

## Chronic Neck Pain

### ***Acupuncture***

Our search identified two recent systematic reviews<sup>68,69</sup> of acupuncture for chronic neck pain and three additional randomized trials<sup>78,79,81</sup> not included in the reviews that reported outcomes at least four weeks after the completion of acupuncture treatment or six months or more after initiation of therapy.

#### Key Trial: MacPherson 2015

MacPherson and colleagues randomized 517 patients with chronic neck pain to acupuncture, the Alexander Technique, or usual care. The acupuncture arm received 12 50-minute sessions either weekly or every other week over no more than six months. The Alexander Technique arm received 20 30-minute sessions either weekly or every other week over the same period.<sup>78</sup> The Alexander Technique focuses on improving posture and movement through mindfulness in order to decrease tension in the body. The usual care arm received medications and physical therapy visits consistent with routine clinical practice in a primary care population.<sup>78</sup>

The primary outcome for the study was the score on the Northwick Park Neck Pain Questionnaire (NPQ) at 12 months. The NPQ is a joint measure of both pain and disability that has been validated in the literature.<sup>36</sup> Secondary outcomes included pain intensity on a 0-8 scale collected by text message, the SF-12 physical and mental component scores, self-efficacy collected through the Chronic Pain Self-Efficacy Scale (score 0-8), and preferences and expectations. Adverse events were collected throughout the study.

Overall baseline characteristics were balanced among the arms with a mean age of 53 years, 69% female, and a median duration of neck pain of six years. At 12 months, 442 subjects (85%) provided outcome data with no difference in loss to follow-up between the arms.

At 12 months, the reduction in the NPQ was greater in the acupuncture arm compared to usual care (-3.9 point, 95% CI -6.9 to -1.0). After adjusting for covariates, the difference was slightly greater (-4.0 points, 95% CI -6.7 to -1.4). The mean percentage reduction in the NPQ at one year was 32% for the acupuncture group, 31% for the Alexander Technique group, and 23% for usual care. Comparisons between the acupuncture group and the Alexander Technique group were not reported.

Current pain levels were assessed with a text message system and a pain intensity score of 0-8 (0 equals no pain, 8 equals worst pain). Only 70.6% of study enrollees participated in the text message outcome; there was a greater reduction in pain for the acupuncture group compared with usual care (0.60 points on the 8-point VAS,  $p < 0.001$ ). There was no difference between the acupuncture group and the usual care group on the physical component score of the SF-12 at one year, but there

was a significant difference in the mental component score (1.8 points, 95% CI 0.1 to 3.4). There were also greater improvements in self-efficacy with acupuncture compared with usual care (-3.3 points, 95% CI -4.4 to -2.3).

Serious adverse events occurred in a similar proportion of patients in each group (5.2% acupuncture, 7.6% Alexander technique, 4.7% usual care). Non-serious adverse events were numerically more common in the acupuncture group (13.9% acupuncture, 10.5% Alexander technique, 4.7% usual care). Adverse events that were classified as possibly related to acupuncture included bruising, swelling, numbness, muscle spasms, pain, and respiratory problems.

### Reduction in Disability / Improvement in Function

In the Yuan systematic review, acupuncture was superior to sham acupuncture in disability reduction up to one month after treatment (SMD -0.42, 95% CI, -0.66 to -0.19).<sup>69</sup> The improvement remained significant at three months (SMD -0.37, 95% CI -0.59 to -0.14).<sup>69</sup> There was no significant reduction in disability compared with sham TENS.<sup>69</sup>

Six studies met our inclusion criteria, but only three reported functional outcomes. The three studies that compared acupuncture to sham acupuncture reported an improvement of 0.4 to 5.6 points on the NPQ at 12 to 24 weeks follow-up, which was consistent with the Yuan review findings. In the small study comparing acupuncture to NSAID therapy, the improvement in disability was greater than that for NSAID therapy (0.7 at seven weeks).<sup>81</sup> When compared to usual care, the reduction in disability at one year was 3.1 points greater with acupuncture.<sup>78</sup>

### Reduction in Pain

In the 2015 review by Yuan et al., a meta-analysis of two RCTs showed that up to one month after treatment, acupuncture was superior to sham acupuncture in pain relief (WMD -0.72, 95% CI -1.07 to -0.37).<sup>69</sup> Pain benefit was no longer significant by three months follow-up.

Among the six trials meeting our inclusion criteria, four trials reported a change in pain scores ranging from -1.7 to 2.1 points comparing acupuncture to sham acupuncture, with the overall range consistent with the findings in the Yuan review. Comparing acupuncture to a waitlist control, pain intensity was 2.5 points lower in the acupuncture group at 12 weeks. When acupuncture was compared to NSAIDs, pain intensity decreased more in the acupuncture group (0.8 points at seven weeks).

### Other Reported Benefits

Improvements in self-efficacy and mental component scores on the SF-12 in the key trial were greater for acupuncture compared with usual care.<sup>78</sup>

## ***Cognitive Behavioral Therapy***

A recent Cochrane review evaluated CBT for both subacute and chronic neck pain.<sup>66</sup> The review included eight studies with a total of 499 patients with chronic neck pain. Five of the eight studies were assessed to have a high risk of bias. Our search did not identify any additional randomized trials with intermediate- to long-term follow-up.

### ***Reduction in Disability / Improvement in Function***

The Cochrane review reported that CBT reduced disability in the short term compared with physical therapy (SMD -0.61, 95% CI -1.2 to -0.01) based on two trials (n=89) with a high risk of bias. They also reported that CBT added to other treatments did not reduce disability more than other treatments alone in reducing disability in the short term (SMD -0.10, 95% CI -0.56 to +0.36) based on three trials (n=185).

Among the six trials meeting our inclusion criteria, three trials compared CBT to usual care and reported significant improvements of 3.0 to 4.3 points on the NDI at up to one year of follow-up, which was consistent with the findings of the Cochrane review. Three additional trials reported disability outcomes for CBT in combination with physical therapy (PT) that were worse in the CBT plus PT group compared to PT alone (-0.9 points).

### ***Reduction in Pain***

The Cochrane review reported that CBT reduced pain in the short term compared with physical therapy (SMD -0.58, 95% CI -1.0 to -0.2) based on three trials (n=89) with a high risk of bias. They reported that CBT did not reduce pain more than physical therapy in the intermediate term (SMD -0.89, 95% CI -2.7 to +0.94) based on two trials (n=168).

Among the six trials meeting our inclusion criteria, the reduction in pain with CBT compared with usual care ranged from -0.4 to 1.5 points at four to six months and was 0 points in the one trial reporting outcomes at 12 months. This range of findings was consistent with those reported in the Cochrane review. Three trials compared CBT in combination with PT to PT alone: the reduction in pain ranged from 0.3 to 0.7 points at four to six months and 0.5 points at 12 months.

### ***Other Reported Benefits***

There were no additional reported benefits.

## ***Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction***

Our search did not identify any systematic reviews or trials of MBSR for the management of chronic neck pain that met our inclusion criteria.



## ***Yoga***

Our search did not identify any systematic reviews or trials of yoga for the management of chronic neck pain that met our inclusion criteria.

## ***Tai Chi***

Our search identified one systematic review of tai chi for chronic neck pain.<sup>67</sup> That systematic review, published in 2016, did not identify any relevant trials. Our search identified one subsequent trial, also published in 2016, that met our inclusion criteria.<sup>77</sup> It is described below as the key trial.

### Key Trial: *Lauche 2016*

Lauche et al. randomized 114 patients with chronic neck pain to tai chi, traditional neck exercises, or a waitlist control and followed patients for 24 weeks (12 weeks of intervention and an additional 12 weeks of follow-up).<sup>77</sup> Those randomized to the tai chi arm (n=38) received 12 weeks of Yang-style tai chi (75- to 90-minute group sessions weekly) using an explicit protocol. Participants were also asked to practice tai chi at home for 15 minutes each day. The neck exercise participants (n=37) were given group classes on a weekly basis for 12 weeks (60-75 minutes each class) and were taught basic exercises (proprioceptive, isometric, dynamic mobilization, stretching, strengthening and core). Neck exercise participants were also asked to practice at home for 15 minutes per day. Wait list participants (n=39) were instructed to continue with usual treatments but not to engage in any new therapy during the 24 weeks of the study. All waitlist participants could receive tai chi or neck exercises at the end of the study.

The groups were comparable at baseline; mean age was 49 years and 80% were female. Pain intensity at 12 weeks was significantly lower in the tai chi group compared with the waitlist group (difference -1.0, 95% CI -2.0 to -0.1) and remained significant at 24 weeks (difference -1.1, 95% CI -2.1 to -0.03). There was no difference in pain intensity between the tai chi arm and neck exercise arm at 12 or 24 weeks.

Patients randomized to the tai chi group had a greater reduction in disability on the NDI compared with the waitlist group at both 12 (difference -7.2, 95% -11.7 to -2.7) and 24 weeks (difference -6.6, 95% CI, -11.6 to -1.6). No differences were found in disability reduction between the tai chi and neck exercise arms.

Adverse events were uncommon. In the tai chi group two patients reported Achilles tendon pain and one reported a migraine that were thought to be possibly related to tai chi. In the neck exercise group one participant reported knee pain that was thought to be related to the neck exercises.



### Reduction in Disability / Improvement in Function

There is no additional information beyond that found in the key trial.

### Reduction in Pain

There is no additional information beyond that found in the key trial.

### Other Reported Benefits

At 24 weeks, average pain on movement scores were lower in the tai chi arm compared to the waitlist arm (-14.3 on a 100-point scale; 95% CI -22.0 to -6.7).<sup>77</sup> Other significant secondary outcomes include improvements in physical quality of life and social role functioning in the tai chi arm compared to the waitlist arm.<sup>77</sup> No significant differences were found in any endpoint at 24 weeks between the tai chi arm and the active neck exercise arm.<sup>77</sup>

### **Harms**

These five interventions were well-tolerated for both back and neck pain. No serious adverse events were reported in the trials that were thought to be related to the intervention. Commonly-reported adverse events included bleeding and pain at the site of acupuncture needles, and strains and joint aches in patients receiving the MBSR, yoga, tai chi interventions. An increase in back and neck pain for up to one month was sometimes reported. No adverse events were reported with CBT.

### **Controversies and Uncertainties**

There are a number of issues that are important to consider when assessing the evidence base for the cognitive and mind-body interventions. First, each of the categories of interventions considered represents a range of possible interventions. There are many different approaches to acupuncture, different kinds of CBT, and there many different schools of yoga and tai chi and different poses and breathing techniques that could be used within each school. It may be that there is one form of yoga that is particularly effective at managing chronic low back pain, but that form of yoga has not been identified in trials to date. The number and quality of the studies is not sufficiently high to identify a particular sub-genre of any of the mind body therapies as most effective. The heterogeneity within each mind-body intervention is further complicated by variation in the skill level of the therapist teaching patients each of the interventions. MBSR is the one intervention with an agreed upon standard approach to teaching the intervention and training the teachers.

There is also significant heterogeneity within each disease category. There are many different causes for chronic low back and neck pain. Low back pain and neck pain can be sub-divided into those with and without radicular symptoms. Chronic neck pain caused by whiplash is one common subtype. Some patients are being treated with chronic opioid therapies and some suffer from

concomitant depression. There may be mind-body interventions that are particularly effective in one of these subtypes of low back and neck pain, but to date the evidence base is not sufficiently robust to identify any variation in effectiveness for any of the therapies we examine.

Prior systematic reviews find that the five interventions considered in this review improve pain and function to some degree during the active treatment phase. However, chronic pain is just that – long in duration and often for life. It is essential to evaluate the long-term efficacy of the therapy. We attempted to address this by focusing this evidence review on trials of at least six months duration or those that evaluated pain and function at least four weeks after the end of the active treatment phase. Hearteningly, more recent trials are reporting outcomes after one year of follow-up. This is essential to a robust evaluation of the long-term effects of the interventions on chronic pain, a condition that generally persists for the life of the patient and rarely is cured.

A related issue is adherence to the assigned intervention. All five interventions include requirements for attendance and participation in multiple treatment sessions and all except acupuncture include home therapy as well. As noted in the key trial the evaluated both CBT and MBSR for chronic low back pain, adherence to the randomized intervention was relatively low. Interventions that improve adherence with the initial sessions and ongoing practice of these interventions may increase their effect size in both the short and long term. None of the studies examined the extent to which patients continued to practice their new skills at the time of longer term outcome assessment.

Some studies found that sham acupuncture was almost as effective as traditional acupuncture or structured acupuncture, but that both were significantly more effective at improving function and decreasing pain compared with usual care. The differences in outcomes between acupuncture and sham acupuncture were less than the differences between them and usual care. This suggests that a significant proportion of the benefit from acupuncture is the placebo effect. Some argue that this is a useful employment of the placebo effect, while others argue that it is unethical to recommend such treatment.

It is difficult, if not impossible to blind patients to the receipt of CBT, MBSR, yoga, or tai chi. The primary outcomes of trials in patients with chronic pain are subjective outcomes (function, pain, quality of life), which are most susceptible to placebo/nocebo effects.<sup>84-86</sup> Thus the effect size observed in these trials may be greater than the true treatment effect. Evidence from trials of acupuncture with and without an appropriate sham control support this hypothesis.

Finally, it is difficult to interpret the clinical significance of average changes in continuous measures of function, quality of life, and pain. Categorical measures reporting the proportion of patients achieving a clinically meaningful improvement in function, quality of life, and pain are more useful and should be reported in addition to average group changes.

## Summary

### Chronic Low Back Pain

**Table 4.7. Comparative Clinical Effectiveness for Mind-Body Interventions for Chronic Low Back Pain Added to Usual Care Versus Usual Care Alone Over the Long Term**

Intervention	Net Health Benefit	Level of Certainty	ICER Evidence Rating
Acupuncture	Small	Moderate	C+: Comparable or better
CBT	Small	Moderate	C+: Comparable or better
MBSR	Small	Moderate	C+: Comparable or better
Yoga	Small	Moderate	C+: Comparable or better
Tai Chi	Small	Low	P/I: Promising, but inconclusive

CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction

#### **Acupuncture**

The evidence for the effectiveness of acupuncture for the treatment of chronic low back pain is complex. The majority of trials and meta-analyses confirm small to moderate improvements in function and pain compared with usual care immediately following the completion of therapy. However, the differences in outcomes are smaller and often non-significant clinically when compared to sham acupuncture, suggesting that much of the benefit may be from the placebo effect. Furthermore, the magnitude of the benefits for acupuncture decline with longer follow-up. We placed the greatest weight on the results of studies with at least one year of follow-up. That said, the harms of treatment were uncommon and generally mild. Thus, we assess the net health benefit to be small. The majority of the studies were small and had less than one year of follow-up and there was some inconsistency in the results, so we assessed the level of certainty to be moderate. Therefore, we consider acupuncture to be comparable or better when added to usual care (physician recommendations and educational handouts with oral analgesics and physical therapy) for chronic low back pain (Table 4.7 above).

#### **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy**

The evidence for the effectiveness of CBT for the treatment of chronic low back pain is based on fewer trials than acupuncture, but they were larger, longer, and more often focused on chronic pain. The majority of trials and meta-analyses confirmed small to moderate improvements in function and pain compared with usual care immediately following the completion of therapy. In the most recent trial, the benefits were small, but sustained at one and two years of follow-up. There were additional benefits in terms of reduced depression and improved quality of life. The harms of treatment were uncommon and generally mild. Thus, we assess the net health benefit to be small. The studies were of moderate size, not blinded, and there was some inconsistency in the

results, so we assessed the level of certainty to be moderate. Therefore, we consider CBT to be comparable or better when added to usual care for chronic low back pain.

### ***Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction***

The evidence for the effectiveness of MBSR for the treatment of chronic low back pain is similar to that for CBT. The key trial demonstrating sustained benefits for CBT found equivalent benefits for MBSR. As in the evidence base for CBT, the majority of trials and meta-analyses confirmed small to moderate improvements in function and pain compared with usual care immediately following the completion of therapy. In the most recent trial, the benefits were small, but sustained at one and two years of follow-up. The additional benefits observed for CBT (reduced depression and improved quality of life) were smaller and not significant for MBSR. The harms of treatment are uncommon and generally mild. Thus, we assess the net health benefit to be small. The studies were of moderate size, not blinded, and there was some inconsistency in the results, so we assess the level of certainty to be moderate. Therefore, we consider MBSR to be comparable or better when added to usual care for chronic low back pain.

### ***Yoga***

The AHRQ review, which included 14 RCTs, concluded that yoga had small to moderate benefits compared with education and usual care, but with low strength of evidence. We identified an additional four randomized trials with longer follow-up that support the effectiveness of yoga for low back pain, though the magnitude of the benefits was smaller with longer follow-up. As with the other therapies, the harms of yoga were mild, so we assess the net health benefit to be small. The studies were of small to moderate size, not blinded, and there was some inconsistency in the results, so we assess the level of certainty to be moderate. Therefore, we consider yoga to be comparable or better when added to usual care for chronic low back pain.

### ***Tai Chi***

There was substantially less evidence for the effectiveness of tai chi for low back pain. On the basis of two fair-quality trials, the AHRQ review concluded that tai chi had a moderate effect on pain and a small effect on function with low strength of evidence. We did not identify any additional randomized trials. We assessed the net health benefit to be small with a low level of certainty because of the paucity of trials and the lack of trials with follow-up beyond six months. Therefore, we consider that the evidence for the effectiveness of tai chi for chronic low back pain to be promising, but inconclusive compared to usual care.

## Chronic Neck Pain

**Table 4.8. Comparative Clinical Effectiveness for Mind-Body Interventions for Chronic Neck Pain Added to Usual Care Versus Usual Care Alone Over the Long Term**

Intervention	Net Health Benefit	Level of Certainty	ICER Evidence Rating
Acupuncture	Small	Low	P/I: Promising, but inconclusive
CBT	Small to none	Low	I: Insufficient
MBSR	Unknown	Low	I: Insufficient
Yoga	Unknown	Low	I: Insufficient
Tai Chi	Small to none	Low	I: Insufficient

CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction

### ***Acupuncture***

The evidence for the effectiveness of acupuncture for the treatment of chronic neck pain is similar to that for chronic low back pain. The majority of trials and meta-analyses confirmed small to moderate improvements in function and pain compared with usual care immediately following the completion of therapy. The harms of treatment are uncommon and generally mild. Thus, we assess the net health benefit to be small. The majority of the studies were small and had less than one year of follow-up and there was some inconsistency in the results, so we assess the level of certainty to be low. Therefore, we consider the evidence for acupuncture to be promising, but inconclusive when added to usual care for chronic neck pain.

### ***Cognitive Behavioral Therapy***

The evidence for the effectiveness of CBT for the treatment of chronic neck pain is less robust than the evidence for low back pain. The majority of trials are short term and equivocal in terms of significant reductions in disability and pain beyond the active treatment period. The harms of treatment were uncommon and generally mild. Thus, we assess the net health benefit to be small to none. The studies were sparse, small, not blinded, and there was some inconsistency in the results, so we assessed the level of certainty to be low. Therefore, we consider the evidence for CBT to be insufficient (I) to assess its value when added to usual care for chronic neck pain.

### ***Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction***

We did not identify any randomized trials of MBSR for chronic neck pain that reported outcomes at least four weeks after the end of active treatment or that lasted six months. The net health benefits are unknown and the level of certainty is low. Therefore, we consider the evidence for MBSR for chronic neck pain to be insufficient (I).

## ***Yoga***

We did not identify any randomized trials of yoga for chronic neck pain that reported outcomes at least four weeks after the end of active treatment or that lasted six months. The net health benefits are unknown and the level of certainty is low. Therefore, we consider the evidence for yoga for chronic neck pain to be insufficient (I).

## ***Tai Chi***

We identified one small trial of tai chi for chronic neck pain. Only 38 patients were randomized to the tai chi arm. The trial was open label with the comparison group, a wait list, potentially susceptible to the placebo effect due to disappointment from not being randomized to the active group. The effect size on function (7 points on the 100-point NDI) and pain (1 point on a 10-point VAS) were small and potentially exaggerated by the lack of blinding. There were no differences comparing tai chi to neck exercises. The potential harms were uncommon and mild, but we still judge the net health benefit to be small to none based on this one trial. The level of certainty is low. Therefore, we consider the evidence for tai chi used for patients with chronic neck pain to be insufficient (I) compared to usual care.

## 5. Economic Analyses

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### 5.1 Long-Term Cost Effectiveness

#### Overview<sup>i</sup>

The aim of this analysis was to estimate the cost-effectiveness of the nonpharmacologic interventions considered in this review for the treatment of chronic low back pain. We did not model the use of any of the nonpharmacologic interventions for chronic neck pain due to a lack of published evidence on key clinical inputs required for the model, such as clinically meaningful response to each intervention of interest, quality of life estimates associated with chronic neck pain, improvement of neck pain after intervention, and length of treatment with each intervention. Each of the interventions (acupuncture, CBT, MBSR, yoga, and tai chi) was compared to usual care, which was defined as self-care guidance and educational information on stretching, strengthening, exercise, and lifestyle modifications. Model parameters were obtained from the published literature. We estimated the total costs, quality-adjusted life years (QALYs) gained, incremental cost per case of clinically-significant pain improvement (i.e., intervention success), and incremental cost-effectiveness ratios relative to usual care, using a health care system perspective over a five-year time horizon. Uncertainty in data inputs and assumptions was evaluated through sensitivity and scenario analyses.

#### Cost-Effectiveness Model: Methods

##### *Model Structure*

We built a *de novo* Markov model in Microsoft Excel, as depicted in Figure 5.1. The model structure is based partly on prior published models that evaluated interventions to treat chronic low back pain.<sup>87,88</sup> A representative cohort of patients with chronic low back pain, defined as low back pain lasting for at least three months,<sup>89</sup> entered the model. Patients transitioned between health states during six-month cycles over a five-year time horizon. We did not use a lifetime horizon because of the short duration of the interventions (12 weeks or less), a lack of data regarding durability of treatment effects beyond one year, and an absence of data on subsequent lines of therapy following intervention failure. The model used a 3% discount rate for costs and health outcomes, and costs were converted to 2016 US dollars.

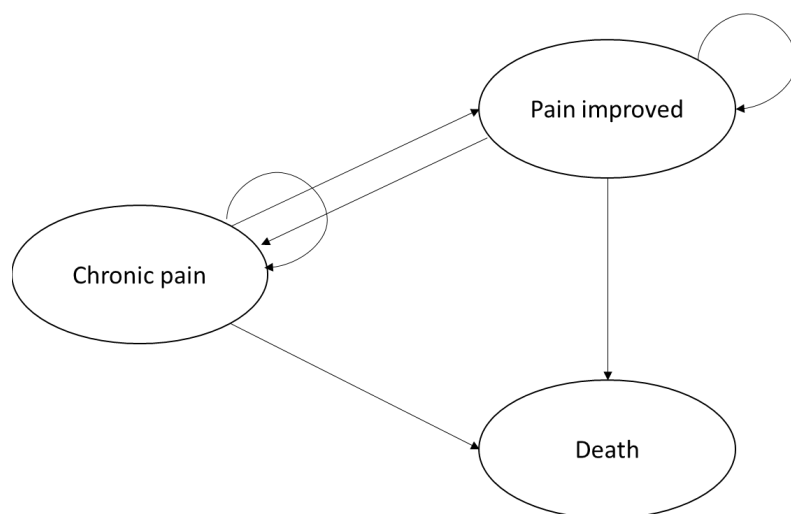
The model consisted of three health states: chronic pain, pain improved, and death. Patients entered the model in the chronic pain health state, and could remain in that health state or transition to a pain improved state or death at the beginning of each cycle. Patients in the pain

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<sup>i</sup> The economic analysis results have been updated since the October 19, 2017 public meeting of the California Technology Assessment Forum

improved health state remained there until they either relapsed to chronic pain or died from other causes (i.e., background mortality). Patients with no improvement in pain after initial therapy were assumed to cease treatment and returned to receiving usual care. In subsequent cycles, they either remained in a state of chronic pain or experienced spontaneous improvement in pain, which was assumed to occur at the same rate as pain improvement associated with usual care. Because none of the treatments were assumed to have any effect on mortality, deaths were modeled using age-specific all-cause mortality rates alone.

**Figure 5.1. Markov Model Structure for Chronic Low Back Pain Patients**



### ***Target Population***

The modeled population was patients with chronic low back pain who were untreated or had not previously been treated with any of the included interventions. Chronic back pain excluded back pain due to cancer, infection, inflammatory arthropathy, high-velocity trauma, fracture, or pregnancy, and that is not associated with progressive neurological deficits. The mean age of the population in the model was 47 years, and 60% of patients were female, based on the compositions of populations seen in trial data.<sup>12,13</sup>

### ***Key Model Characteristics***

The base-case analysis was conducted from a health care system perspective, and thus focused on all direct intervention costs and medical care costs. For a more detailed description of the types of impacts included in this analysis from a health care system perspective, see the impact inventory in Appendix Table E1. All future costs and outcomes were discounted at 3% per year.

### ***Key Model Assumptions***

The model was informed by several assumptions, as listed in Table 5.1.



**Table 5.1. Key Model Assumptions**

Assumption	Rationale
The model utilized data from multiple trials and observational studies to derive effectiveness estimates for each intervention.	Given the paucity of head-to-head comparisons, we did not utilize any formal indirect treatment comparison methods.
The model did not assume subsequent lines of therapy for those who had not improved or had a relapse of pain.	We did not find any evidence on the relative effectiveness of chronic back pain therapies following prior treatment failure. Additionally, the objective of this analysis was to model different treatment alternatives for low back pain and not different treatment pathways.
We assumed the same probability of treatment response for all active interventions except tai chi.	Our evidence review of the trial data concluded that the four other interventions had similar efficacy, with very small differences seen between interventions.
We have not modeled adverse events related to any of the included interventions.	Based on the clinical trials and observational data reviewed, we found no mention of specific adverse events severe enough to accrue costs or disutilities associated with any of the therapies included.
Spontaneous improvement in pain following unsuccessful treatment with any of the listed interventions beyond the first year of the model is assumed to be the same as pain improvement with usual care.	We have not found any published literature on spontaneous pain improvement following intervention failure.
The probability of transitioning from the “chronic pain” state to the “pain improved” state was assumed to be the same as the probability of improved disability (based on change in RMDQ score).	We found no robust published data on the probability of improvements in pain that could be used across the various treatment modalities. We did find such data for improvements in disability.
Those with pain improvement and without relapse (whether via usual care or any intervention) were assumed to have constant quality of life, without any deterioration over time.	We found no evidence on declining efficacy of interventions over time, or any evidence on utilities or effectiveness beyond the first year of treatment. Trial follow-up periods lasted no longer than 52 weeks from initiation of intervention.
Recurrence (relapse) of chronic back pain was not assumed to be intervention-specific; the same estimate has been applied to all interventions and comparators.	No published evidence on intervention-specific recurrence was available.
Patients with relapsed pain following an intervention accrued costs (background care costs) and QALYs associated with chronic pain.	Due to a lack of published evidence, we assumed patients would revert to their baseline level of chronic pain.

QALY: quality-adjusted life year

### ***Treatment Strategies***

The interventions included in the model were the same as those in the clinical evidence review (acupuncture, CBT, MBSR, yoga and tai chi). All interventions except acupuncture were assumed to

be offered in a group format, in keeping with the clinical trials.<sup>12-14</sup> We compared each intervention to usual care, which included self-care guidance and educational information on stretching, strengthening, exercise, and lifestyle modifications. As described in the key assumptions table, both interventions and usual care were assumed to be initiated with a one-time doctor's office visit lasting 15 minutes and 25 minutes, respectively. We assumed that the 15-minute visit would primarily involve referral to one of the interventions of interest, while the longer 25-minute visit would include discussion between the patient and doctor about usual care for chronic low back pain. As described above, all interventions were assumed to be completed during the first six-month cycle of the model, and we did not model subsequent lines of therapy when patients were unsuccessfully treated with an intervention or relapsed following therapy.

**Table 5.2. Frequency and Duration of Interventions to Treat Chronic Low Back Pain**

Intervention	Frequency and Intensity	Reference
<b>Acupuncture</b>	Two 20-minute sessions/week for three weeks followed by one 20-minute session/week for four weeks	Cherkin et al., 2009 <sup>11</sup>
<b>CBT</b>	One two-hour group session/week for eight weeks	Cherkin et al., 2016 <sup>12</sup>
<b>MBSR</b>	One two-hour group session/week for eight weeks plus optional 6-hour retreat	Cherkin et al., 2016 <sup>12</sup>
<b>Yoga</b>	One 75-minute session/week for 12 weeks	Sherman et al., 2011 <sup>13</sup>
<b>Tai Chi</b>	Two 40-minute sessions/week for eight weeks followed by one 40-minute session/week for two weeks	Hall et al., 2011 <sup>14</sup>

CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction

### ***Clinical Inputs***

Transition probabilities between chronic pain and pain improved health states for each intervention were derived using a rounded average from relevant clinical trials (Table 5.3). Transition probabilities for chronic low back pain were based on the percentage of patients who had a clinically meaningful improvement on the RMDQ. A clinically-meaningful improvement was defined as a  $\geq 30\%$  decrease in RMDQ score from baseline.<sup>73,90</sup> Given the six-month cycle length of the model, we used the percentage of patients with a clinically meaningful improvement in RMDQ reported at 26 weeks in the trials for all interventions except tai chi. The longest reported follow-up with tai chi was only 10 weeks after baseline, so we assumed that the percentage of patients with clinically meaningful improvement at 10 weeks was the same at 26 weeks.

As mentioned earlier in the model assumptions section, we assumed the same transition probability of moving from a chronic pain health state to an improved pain health state for all active interventions except tai chi. This was because the likelihood of clinical improvement in separate trials for each intervention varied over only a very narrow range (acupuncture: 0.58 – yoga: 0.66), and there were a paucity of data directly comparing these interventions. We nevertheless used summary estimates specific to each intervention in sensitivity analyses.

The transition probability for recurrence of pain (i.e., relapse) was derived from a previously published cost-effectiveness model of chronic low back pain. The model, by Norton et al., included an annual rate of recurrence based on observational data, which we converted to a six-month probability (formula in Appendix Table E2).<sup>87</sup> Patients also had a probability of death from all causes, which was derived using age- and gender-adjusted US general population mortality rates.<sup>91</sup> As mentioned in the assumptions table, the interventions included here were assumed to have no effect on mortality.

**Table 5.3. Transition Probabilities for Pain Improvement or Recurrence**

	Mean	Lower Range	Upper Range	Source
<b>Acupuncture</b>	0.600*	0.480 <sup>†</sup>	0.720 <sup>†</sup>	Cherkin et al., 2009 <sup>11</sup>
<b>CBT</b>	0.600*	0.492	0.676	Cherkin et al., 2016 <sup>12</sup>
<b>MBSR</b>	0.600*	0.520	0.703	Cherkin et al., 2016 <sup>12</sup>
<b>Yoga</b>	0.600*	0.560	0.780	Sherman et al., 2011 <sup>13</sup>
<b>Tai Chi</b>	0.500	0.450 <sup>‡</sup>	0.600 <sup>‡</sup>	Hall et al., 2011 <sup>14</sup>
<b>Usual Care</b>	0.441	0.359	0.542 <sup>§</sup>	Cherkin et al., 2016 <sup>12</sup>
<b>Recurrence</b>	0.259	0.126	0.346	Calculation, Norton et al., 2015 <sup>87</sup>

CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction

All transition probabilities are six-month probabilities.

\*Average of transition probabilities for acupuncture, CBT, mindfulness therapy and yoga reported in studies.

<sup>†</sup>Assumed range of 20% around the point estimate.

<sup>‡</sup>Does not represent a 20% lower-end range. Assumed to be greater than the mean estimate of effectiveness associated with usual care in the one-way sensitivity analysis.

<sup>§</sup>Assumed to be lower than the mean estimate of effectiveness in the one-way sensitivity analysis for tai chi.

### **Quality of Life Inputs**

Health state utilities were obtained from trial data and applied to the chronic pain and pain improved health states (Table 5.4).<sup>15</sup> The trial was conducted in a sample of 234 patients with chronic low back pain in the UK, randomized to receive either a community-based CBT program (two hours per week for eight weeks) or general practitioner care. Utilities were measured using the EuroQoL (EQ-5D) instrument at baseline and followed up at different time points up to 15 months from baseline. We assumed that utility values for the same health states did not vary across interventions in the model, and also assumed that the health state utilities did not vary across interventions after patients relapsed to back or neck chronic pain states. The utility score of 0.75 reported by Johnson et al. included all patients and not just those with an improvement in pain, so we performed a calculation (described in Appendix E3) to derive a utility estimate for only patients with improved pain (0.81). The ranges for this utility score were assumed to be 10% on either side of the calculated mean estimate.

**Table 5.4. Health State Utilities**

	Base Case	Lower Range	Upper Range	Std. Dev	Source
<b>Chronic Pain (Baseline) – Low back</b>	0.66	--	--	0.22	Johnson et al., 2007 <sup>15</sup>
<b>Pain Improved – Low Back</b>	0.81	0.729	0.891	0.24	Johnson et al., 2007 <sup>15</sup> Ranges Calculated*
<b>Death</b>	0	0	0	--	Convention

Std. Dev: standard deviation

\*Calculations based on the assumption of  $\pm 10\%$  of the mean estimate

### **Cost Inputs**

Costs included all direct costs of care, including intervention and usual care costs for chronic low back as well as background health care costs. As several of these interventions may not currently be covered by payers, we included out-of-pocket prices reported in the grey literature as part of direct costs. Intervention costs are one-time costs that were applied in the first cycle of the model. We were unable to identify any representative real-world data on costs of group pain CBT sessions; given that most CBT across various conditions is provided in individual sessions, we used costs for individual sessions in our model. The fee for a one-time doctor's office visit lasting either 15 minutes or 25 minutes was added to the cost of each intervention or usual care, respectively. Since usual care consisted of self-care, no additional costs (except background health care costs) were added to this arm. All intervention costs listed in Table 5.5 are per-session costs, based on sessions provided in a group format, except for acupuncture and usual care, which are provided to patients on an individual basis.

Background health care costs included additional office visits, hospital stays, laboratory tests, and pharmacologic therapy, and differed based on health state.<sup>16</sup> Those in the pain improved state were assumed to have only 43% of background health care costs of those in the chronic pain state, as reported in a matched healthcare claims analysis of patients with and without a diagnosis of chronic low back pain.<sup>23</sup>

All costs were inflated to 2016 US dollars using the medical care component of the US Consumer Price Index.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 5.5. Cost Inputs**

Service	Cost		Source
Acupuncture (per session)	\$104*		Zhang, 2014 <sup>18</sup>
CBT (per session)	\$212*		Gore et al., 2012 <sup>19</sup>
Yoga (per session)	\$18		Assumed to be the same cost as a session of tai chi
MBSR (per session)	\$59†		Innerwell Integrative Counseling Services <sup>20</sup>
Tai Chi (per session)	\$18		The Tai Chi Center <sup>21</sup>
Office Visit Costs for Active Intervention‡	\$52		Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services <sup>22</sup>
Usual Care Costs (total)§	\$109*		Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services <sup>22</sup>
Background Care Costs per Patient per Cycle	Chronic Pain	Improved Pain#	Source
Physician Visits	\$78	\$34	Fritz et al., 2012; <sup>16</sup> Gore et al., 2012 <sup>23</sup>
Emergency Room Visits	\$7	\$3	
Prescription Medication	\$39	\$17	
Imaging Procedures	\$108	\$47	
Inpatient Non-Surgical Procedures	\$30	\$13	
Injection/Surgical Procedures	\$275	\$119	
Other Pain-Related Costs	\$163	\$71	

\*One-on-one session

†Calculated by dividing total course cost of \$475 by eight sessions; costs associated with the six-hour retreat were amortized over the eight sessions.

‡Assumed to be one office visit pertaining to referral to active intervention, using CPT code 99213 for an established patient visit for a 15-minute duration.

§Assumed to be one office visit pertaining to obtaining patient education book on self-care, using CPT code 99214 for an established patient visit for a 25-minute duration.

#Assumed 43% of costs seen in patients with chronic pain, derived from Gore et al., 2012, comparing health care costs for patients with chronic low back pain and population without chronic low back pain.

### **Adverse Events**

We found no mention of specific adverse events severe enough to accrue costs or disutilities associated with any of the therapies included here, and therefore did not include adverse events in the model.

### **Mortality**

None of the interventions included had a mortality effect. Only background all-cause mortality, obtained from age- and gender-adjusted US general population mortality rates, was included in the model.<sup>91</sup>

## ***Sensitivity Analyses***

We ran one-way sensitivity analyses to identify the key drivers of model outcomes. We also ran probabilistic sensitivity analyses comparing each intervention to usual care by simultaneously varying key model inputs using appropriate distributions over 5,000 simulations, then calculating the probability of each intervention being cost-effective at three commonly-cited cost-effectiveness thresholds. Relevant scenario analyses were also conducted where adequate data were available, including varying time horizons to one or three years, using a modified societal perspective including productivity loss, and using point estimates for effectiveness of each of the interventions as reported in the trials.

## **Cost-Effectiveness Model: Results**

### ***Base-Case Results***

Each of the nonpharmacologic interventions resulted in increased costs and QALYs compared to usual care over the five-year time horizon. Total costs over five years ranged from approximately \$4,800 for yoga to approximately \$6,300 for CBT (Table 5.6). Incremental costs compared to usual care ranged from approximately \$65 for yoga to approximately \$1,500 for CBT (Table 5.7). Since we assumed the same transition probabilities for all active interventions except tai chi, QALY gains were the same for all remaining interventions, with very small incremental gains compared to usual care (approximately 0.017). Tai chi had an even smaller incremental QALY gain of 0.006 relative to usual care. All interventions fell under the commonly-cited threshold of \$100,000 per QALY gained relative to usual care, with yoga being the most cost-effective at approximately \$3,900 per QALY gained.

Because we used the same utility estimates for all interventions, the same response rate to therapy for all interventions except tai chi, and the same relapse rate for all interventions, the variation in the incremental cost-effectiveness ratios across interventions is primarily driven by the differences in individual intervention costs.

**Table 5.6. Base-Case Deterministic Results**

Therapy	Costs	QALYs
Acupuncture	\$5,657	3.4338
CBT	\$6,316	3.4338
MBSR	\$5,097	3.4338
Yoga	\$4,832	3.4338
Tai Chi	\$4,992	3.4234
Usual Care	\$4,767	3.4173

CBT: cognitive-behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction, QALY: quality-adjusted life year

**Table 5.7. Base-Case Deterministic Incremental Results Versus Usual Care**

Therapy	Incremental Costs	Incremental QALYs	Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio vs. Usual Care (Cost per QALY Gained)
Acupuncture	\$891	0.0165	\$53,933
CBT	\$1,549	0.0165	\$93,799
MBSR	\$330	0.0165	\$19,975
Yoga	\$65	0.0165	\$3,929
Tai Chi	\$225	0.0061	\$36,759
Usual Care	--	--	--

CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction, QALY: quality-adjusted life year

Among the five interventions, the incremental cost of achieving one case of improved pain over the five-year time horizon relative to usual care ranged from \$660 for yoga to approximately \$15,800 for CBT (Table 5.8). Because each intervention's benefit (i.e., pain improvement) occurred within the first two cycles of the model and subsequent benefit was spontaneous and non-intervention related, we used the number of cases with improved pain at the end of one year of treatment.

**Table 5.8. Incremental Cost per Successful Treatment (Pain Improvement) Versus Usual Care**

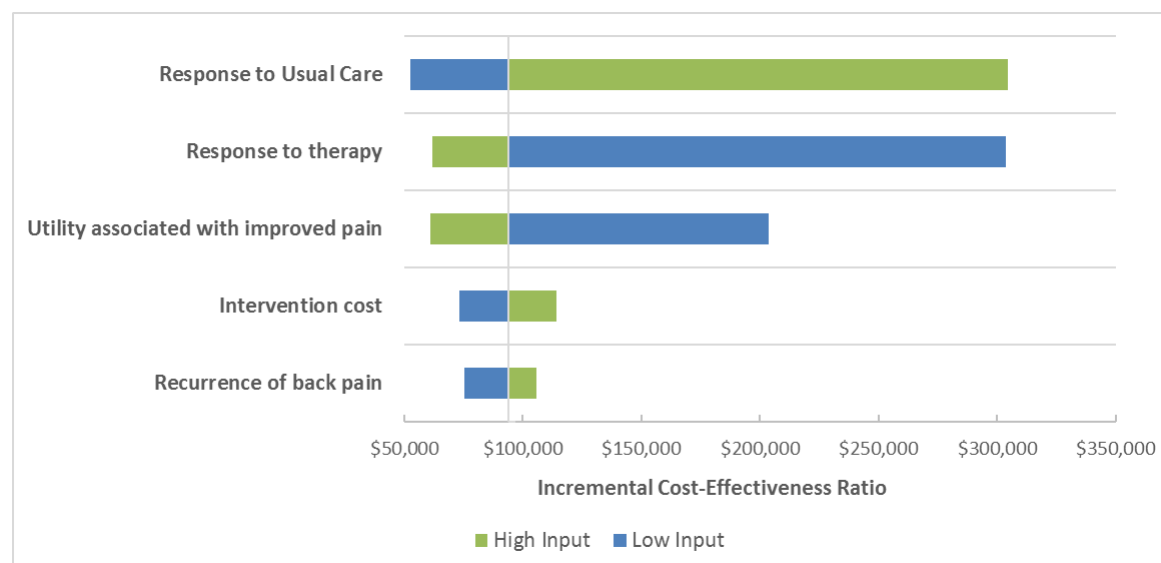
Therapy	Costs
Acupuncture	\$9,067
CBT	\$15,770
MBSR	\$3,358
Yoga	\$660
Tai Chi	\$6,180

CBT: cognitive-behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction, QALY: quality-adjusted life year

### **One-Way Sensitivity Analyses**

One-way sensitivity analyses were conducted for each intervention by varying key model parameters. As an example, we have presented the results for the one-way sensitivity analysis for CBT in Figure 5.2 and Table 5.9. We chose to present the results of CBT in the report since it had the highest incremental cost-effectiveness ratio among all interventions in our analysis. Results of one-way sensitivity analyses for the other interventions are available in Appendix Tables E5-E8 and Figures E1-E4. Response to usual care and to CBT had the the largest impact on incremental cost-effectiveness ratios. Results were also sensitive to response to the health state utility associated with improvement in pain. Intervention costs were not the most sensitive variable because they were incurred only once, in the first model cycle. Results were least sensitive to the probability of back pain recurrence.

**Figure 5.2. One-Way Sensitivity Analysis: Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Versus Usual Care**



Base-case ICER: \$93,799 per QALY gained

**Table 5.9. One-Way Sensitivity Analysis: Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Versus Usual Care**

	Low Input	High Input	Low Input Result	High Input Result	Range
Intervention Cost	\$169.42	\$254.12	\$73,282	\$114,312	\$41,029
Response to Therapy	0.492	0.676	\$303,721	\$61,740	\$241,982
Response to Usual Care	0.359	0.542	\$52,603	\$304,697	\$252,094
Recurrence of Back Pain	0.126	0.346	\$75,481	\$105,832	\$30,350
Utility Associated with Improved Pain	0.729	0.891	\$203,910	\$60,908	\$143,002

### ***Probabilistic Sensitivity Analysis Results***

We also conducted a probabilistic sensitivity analysis, jointly varying model inputs over 5,000 simulations. Incremental cost-effectiveness ratios for CBT were lower than the commonly-cited cost-effectiveness threshold of \$150,000 per QALY in approximately 74% of simulations, while the ratios for yoga were lower than the threshold in approximately 98% of simulations. These incremental cost-effectiveness ratios were under the \$150,000 per QALY threshold in approximately 92% of all simulations for acupuncture, in approximately 97% of all simulations for MBSR, and in approximately 71% of all simulations for tai chi. The probabilistic sensitivity analysis results are shown in Appendix Table E9 and Figures E5-14.



## ***Scenario Analyses - Results***

### ***Time Horizon***

Shortening the model time-horizon to one and three years increased the incremental cost-effectiveness ratios for all interventions relative to usual care, with those of acupuncture and CBT exceeding the commonly-cited threshold of \$150,000 per QALY. Using a one-year time horizon, the results ranged from approximately \$20,700 per QALY gained for yoga to approximately \$273,800 per QALY gained for CBT. These results are driven by the small QALY gains for each intervention relative to usual care, along with the upfront, one-time intervention costs that accrue in the first year. Using a three-year time-horizon, incremental cost-effectiveness results were very similar to the results in the base-case analysis, ranging from approximately \$4,000 per QALY gained for yoga to approximately \$94,300 per QALY gained for CBT. Incremental cost-effectiveness results for each intervention at the one- and three-year time horizon are available in Appendix Table E3.

### ***Modified Societal Perspective***

In this scenario analysis, we included costs associated with lost productivity in patients with chronic low back pain in the model. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately 80% of the population in the 25- to 54-year age group fell under the category of civilian labor force participation, which is the percentage of population that is currently employed or seeking employment.<sup>17</sup> Applying this percentage to the per-person productivity loss reported in a study by the Integrated Benefits Institute, and inflating to 2016 dollars resulted in a per-person productivity loss of approximately \$146 over six months (the model cycle length).<sup>92,93</sup> We did not include costs associated with productivity loss to care-givers due to a lack of published evidence specific to low back pain. Including productivity losses produced incremental cost-effectiveness results very similar to those seen in the base-case, ranging from approximately \$2,000 per QALY gained for yoga to approximately \$91,900 per QALY gained for CBT, relative to usual care over the five-year time-horizon. Incremental cost effectiveness results for each intervention relative to usual care can be found in Appendix Table E5-8 and Appendix Figures E1-4.

### ***Trial-Reported Intervention Effectiveness Estimates***

In this scenario analysis, we used the estimates for clinically-meaningful response to therapy as reported in the trials instead of the average used in the base-case analysis. The input for tai chi did not differ from the base-case model, which already used a trial result. Compared to the base case results, incremental cost-effectiveness ratios for all interventions except yoga and MBSR were greater (less favorable), with results ranging from approximately \$200 per QALY gained for yoga to approximately \$110,600 per QALY gained for CBT over five years. The improvement in incremental cost-effectiveness ratios for yoga and MBSR result from higher trial-reported efficacy estimates compared to the efficacy estimate used in the base-case analysis.

**Table 5.10. Incremental Cost Effectiveness Results Versus Usual Care Using Trial-Reported Intervention Effectiveness Estimates**

Therapy	Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio vs. Usual Care (Cost per QALY Gained)
Acupuncture	\$62,460
CBT	\$110,563
MBSR	\$19,204
Yoga	\$233
Tai Chi	\$36,759*
Usual Care	--

CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction, QALY: quality-adjusted life year

\*Same as base-case result

### **Threshold Analysis**

For each intervention, prices per session that would achieve commonly-cited cost-effectiveness thresholds ranging from \$50,000 to \$150,000 per QALY gained are presented in Table 5.11, along with the base-case cost per session. The price per session at the three cost-effectiveness thresholds for cognitive behavioral therapy and MBSR are equal since both interventions have the same number of sessions in addition to the same treatment efficacy.

**Table 5.11. Threshold Analysis of Cognitive and Mind-Body Therapies for Chronic Low Back Pain**

Intervention	Base-Case Cost per Session	Price to Achieve \$50,000 per QALY	Price to Achieve \$100,000 per QALY	Price to Achieve \$150,000 per QALY
Acupuncture	\$103.58	\$97.09	\$179.66	\$262.24
CBT	\$211.77	\$121.36	\$224.58	\$327.79
MBSR	\$59.38	\$121.36	\$224.58	\$327.79
Yoga	\$17.50	\$80.90	\$149.72	\$218.53
Tai Chi	\$17.50	\$22.01	\$39.03	\$56.05

### **Model Validation and Prior Published Evidence on Costs and Cost-Effectiveness**

Model validation followed standard practices in the field. We tested all mathematical functions in the model to ensure they were consistent with the report. We also conducted sensitivity analyses with null input values to ensure the model produced findings consistent with expectations. Two modelers tested the mathematical functions in the model as well as therapy-specific inputs and corresponding outputs.

We also compared the ICER model to previously published models. We searched the literature to identify models that were similar to ours, with comparable populations, setting, perspective and treatments.

A recent analysis by Herman et al.<sup>94</sup> compared the cost-effectiveness of CBT and MBSR to usual care. The model was populated with trial-based quality of life, treatment efficacy, and cost data. The ICER model sourced treatment efficacy estimates from the same trial<sup>12</sup> used by Herman et al. The results of their analysis, which took a health care system perspective, indicated that CBT had an incremental cost-effectiveness ratio of approximately \$12,000 per QALY gained relative to usual care, while MBSR dominated usual care (i.e., it was more effective and less costly). These results differed from those in the ICER base-case analysis, where CBT and MBSR had incremental cost-effectiveness ratios of approximately \$93,800 and \$20,000 per QALY gained, respectively. Several key differences between the two models explain the difference in results. First, Herman et al. used costs of \$150 for both CBT and MBSR, based on the trial data, while the ICER model used costs of \$212 and \$59 for each session of CBT and MBSR, respectively. Using the intervention costs from Herman et al. in the ICER model resulted in more favorable cost-effectiveness ratios of \$296 per QALY gained for CBT and MBSR versus usual care over a five-year time horizon. Second, the QALY differences between the intervention and usual care in the Herman et al. model (CBT: 0.041; MBSR: 0.034, using SF-6D scores calculated from self-reported health-related quality of life) were greater than the differences in our model (0.017). Third, Herman et al. used non-intervention-related health care cost estimates as observed in the specific population included in the trial, while we sourced cost estimates for our model from an observational study that derived costs from a claims database that included a sample from across the US. Fourth, the Herman et al. model's time horizon was for the duration of the trial, while our model extended beyond trial duration (to five years), which required assumptions about the interventions' long-term effectiveness in the absence of published literature.

Norton et al. developed a cost-utility model comparing CBT to active exercise in patients with chronic low back pain from a US commercial payer perspective.<sup>87</sup> They reported incremental cost-effectiveness results that were much lower than in the ICER model (\$7,197 vs. \$93,799 per QALY gained). Although the ICER model used the same probability of back pain recurrence as in the Norton et al. model, the contrasting results can be attributed to several other differences between the two models. First, a longer time horizon (10 years) was used in the Norton et al. model than in the ICER model (five years). Second, a lower probability of transition (0.31) to an improved pain state for usual care was used in the Norton model compared to the ICER model (0.441). Third, the Norton model used the initial transition probability of pain improvement resulting from CBT (0.59) but with a 20% decrement in each subsequent cycle, whereas in the ICER model treatment benefit of CBT was applied only to the first cycle, after which pain improvement was assumed to occur only spontaneously.

Kim et al. developed a Markov model for low back pain in patients in South Korea over a five-year time horizon from a societal perspective.<sup>88</sup> Patients entered the model with acute low back pain and could transition between no pain and/or chronic low back pain health states. This model compared acupuncture to usual medical care. Although this model had similar baseline utility estimates for chronic pain (0.65), the Kim et al. model accrued higher QALYs (4.24) relative to the ICER model (3.43), predominantly due to higher utility estimates for the pain improved state (Kim et al.: 0.96 vs. ICER: 0.81). In other respects, the Kim et al. model is not comparable to the ICER model (i.e., differences in perspective, setting, modeled health states and costs).

A cost-utility analysis by Thomas et al. compared acupuncture to usual care using clinical evidence from a randomized controlled trial set in three acupuncture clinics in the United Kingdom.<sup>95</sup> Patients' quality-of-life was measured using the SF-6D and EQ-5D questionnaires. Patient sample sizes in the model were reduced to reflect the number of individuals who responded to the questionnaires in the trial. Among a total of 123 patients with follow-up at 24 months in the acupuncture group, 78 patients completed the SF-6D questionnaire and 85 patients completed the EQ-5D questionnaire. There was a statistically-significant difference in mean costs between the acupuncture and usual care group, but the mean difference in QALYs using the EQ-5D was not statistically significant, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -0.036 to 0.178 (mean difference = 0.071). Using a National Health Service perspective, the authors reported an incremental cost-effectiveness ratio of £4,241 (\$11,304<sup>ii</sup>) per QALY gained using SF-6D (mapped from SF-36) and £3,598 (\$9,590) per QALY gained using EQ-5D over a two-year time-horizon. The ICER model estimated a substantially higher cost-utility ratio for acupuncture (at \$53,933 per QALY gained). Key methodological differences between the two models may contribute to the difference in results. The ICER model allowed for worsening pain and associated cost as well as disutility, whereas the Thomas et al. model focused only on utility improvement at a single point in time. Thomas et al. modeled treatment efficacy and subsequent outcomes only for the duration of the trial using utility data directly from the trial, whereas the ICER model estimates intervention efficacy and cost outcomes beyond trials' duration, extending to a period of five years, by making assumptions around intervention efficacy (i.e., no additional intervention-related efficacy following the first cycle of the ICER model) The increase in quality of life from chronic pain to pain improvement with acupuncture was also higher in the Thomas et al. model than in the ICER model (i.e., 0.202 using EQ-5D vs. 0.09). Finally, our assumed costs of acupuncture were significantly higher than those estimated in the UK model (\$1,036 vs. £214 [\$570] in the ICER and UK models respectively), and other background costs were much higher as well.

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<sup>ii</sup> In this section, British pounds were converted to US dollar amounts using the annual average exchange rate from the year of comparator study analysis, and inflating the exchanged US dollar amount using the medical care CPI from the year of study analysis to the 2017 six-month average medical care CPI.<sup>96</sup>

## 5.2 Value-Based Benchmark Prices

Our value-based benchmark prices for the five cognitive and mind-body therapies for low back pain are presented in Table 5.12. As noted in the ICER methods document,<sup>97</sup> the value-based benchmark prices for a drug (or non-drug intervention) are defined as the prices that would achieve incremental cost-effectiveness ratios of \$100,000 and \$150,000 per QALY gained. As none of these interventions have a single, consistent price reported in the literature, we have presented the discounts from the assumed base case price per session that would be required to achieve the three cost-effectiveness thresholds. Note that while the per-session costs may vary, the total cost of each intervention at each threshold would be equal for all interventions except tai chi, as these interventions were awarded the same probability of effectiveness in the model. No discounts were required for any of the therapies to achieve \$100,000 and \$150,000 per QALY cost-effectiveness thresholds; all the therapies could have increases in their prices (premiums) and still achieve these thresholds.

**Table 5.12. Value-Based Benchmark Prices per Session of Cognitive and Mind-Body Therapies for Chronic Low Back Pain**

Intervention	Cost per Session	Price to Achieve \$100,000 per QALY	Price to Achieve \$150,000 per QALY	Discount/Premium from Current Cost to Reach Thresholds
Acupuncture	\$103.58	\$179.66	\$262.24	+73% to +153%
CBT	\$211.77	\$224.58	\$327.79	+6% to +55%
MBSR	\$59.38	\$224.58	\$327.79	+278% to +452%
Yoga	\$17.50	\$149.72	\$218.53	+756% to +1149%
Tai Chi	\$17.50	\$39.03	\$56.05	+123% to +220%

CE: cost-effectiveness, QALY: quality-adjusted life year

“+” Indicates premium

## 5.3 Potential Budget Impact

### Potential Budget Impact Model: Methods

We used results from the same model employed for the cost-effectiveness analyses to estimate total potential budget impact. Potential budget impact was defined as the total differential cost of using the specific low back pain interventions rather than usual care for the treated population, calculated as differential health care costs minus any offsets in these costs from averted health care events. All costs were undiscounted and estimated over one- and five-year time horizons. The five-year timeframe was of primary interest, given the potential for cost offsets to accrue over time and to allow a more realistic impact on the number of patients treated with the therapies not covered by payers.

The potential budget impact analysis included a hypothetical candidate population for treatment that consisted of adults with chronic low back pain for at least three months with pain not due to cancer, infection, inflammatory arthropathy, high-velocity trauma, fracture, or pregnancy, and that is not associated with progressive neurological deficits. We derived the number of eligible patients with chronic low back pain for a hypothetical cohort of 1 million members of a managed care organization. With a point prevalence of 13.1%, based on The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES, 2009–2010), applied to the hypothetical cohort of 1 million members, the number of patients with chronic low back pain was estimated to be 131,000.<sup>24</sup> According to a survey by the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), only 63% of all patients with low back pain seek professional help for pain relief.<sup>25</sup> Applying this percentage to the estimated population with chronic low back pain resulted in an eligible population of 16,506 patients each year, for a total of 82,530 patients over all five years.

We included only MBSR, yoga, and tai chi in the budget impact analysis, deriving the budget impact of each of these interventions relative to usual care. We did not include the other interventions, as evidence suggests that some payers currently cover them (Section 3.1). We modeled these interventions against usual care, varying their uptake over five years to 10%, 25% and 50% of the eligible population. In addition to reporting the results for each intervention over five years, we have also reported the per member per month (PMPM) cost for each intervention relative to usual care. The PMPM cost is the total monthly spending on a pool of insured members of a plan divided by the total number of plan members. ICER's methods for estimating potential budget impact are described in detail [elsewhere](#) and have recently been updated.<sup>97</sup>

## **Potential Budget Impact Model: Results**

### ***Yoga***

Annual potential budget impact ranged from approximately \$124,300 to approximately \$621,300 when treating 10% (2% per year) to 50% (10% per year) of the eligible cohort with yoga relative to usual care. The average potential budget impact over the five-year period was \$41 per patient (Table 5.13). The per member per month (PMPM) cost ranged from \$0.01 to \$0.05 when treating 10% to 50% of the eligible cohort with yoga (Figure 5.3).

### ***Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction***

Annual potential budget impact ranged from approximately \$561,800 to approximately \$2.8 million when treating 10% to 50% of the eligible cohort with MBSR relative to usual care. The average potential budget impact over the five-year period was \$162 per patient (Table 5.13). The PMPM cost ranged from \$0.05 to \$0.23 when treating 10% to 50% of the eligible cohort with MBSR (Figure 5.3).

## Tai Chi

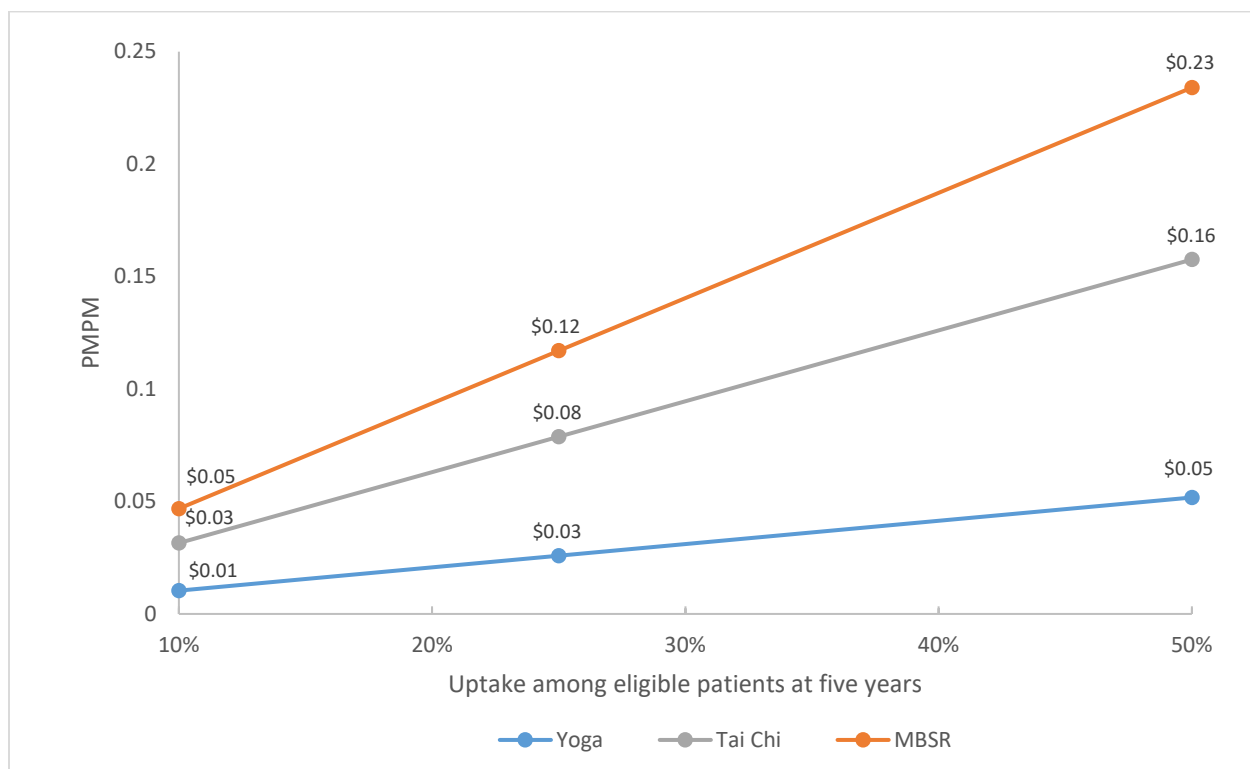
Annual potential budget impact ranged from approximately \$378,300 to approximately \$1.9 million when treating 10% to 50% of the eligible cohort with tai chi relative to usual care. The average potential budget impact over the five-year period was \$107 per patient (Table 5.13). The per-member per-month cost ranged from \$0.03 to \$0.16 when treating between 10% and 50% of the eligible cohort with tai chi (Figure 5.3).

**Table 5.13. Annualized Per Patient Potential Budget Impact Calculations Over a Five-Year Time Horizon**

	Average Annualized Per-Patient Budget Impact			
	Yoga	MBSR	Tai Chi	Usual Care
Per-Patient Budget Impact	\$1,193	\$1,314	\$1,259	\$1,152
Difference (Intervention – Usual Care)	\$41	\$162	\$107	--

MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction

**Figure 5.3. Per-Member Per-Month Cost for Yoga, MBSR, and Tai Chi at Varying Percentages of Treatment Uptake Among the Eligible Cohort**





By way of comparison, Express Scripts estimates that its 2017 expenditures for medications to treat pain and inflammation, including mostly generic NSAIDs, gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) analogs, and opioids, will total \$4.46 PMPM.<sup>26</sup> Our highest budget impact estimate (\$0.23 PMPM if 50% of the eligible population were treated with MBSR) would represent only 5% of this PMPM spend.

## 5.4 Summary and Comment: Long-Term Cost Effectiveness and Potential Budget Impact

We estimated the cost-effectiveness of acupuncture, CBT, MBSR, yoga, and tai chi compared to usual care for patients with chronic low back pain. We did not model chronic neck pain for any of the nonpharmacologic interventions due to a lack of published evidence on key model inputs. The cost per additional QALY ranged from approximately \$3,900 for yoga to approximately \$93,800 for CBT over a five-year time horizon. The findings were most sensitive to response to usual care and each intervention, followed by utility associated improvement in pain. The findings were also sensitive to time horizon, with a shorter time horizon resulting in increased incremental cost-effectiveness results relative to usual care. A scenario analysis using a modified societal perspective produced results similar to those in the base-case analysis.

Our model had several limitations. First, we did not model varying treatment effectiveness over time due to availability of only short-term trial data. We assumed that effectiveness of the intervention occurred only in the first cycle when patients receive an intervention, after which improvement in pain status mirrored that of improvement seen with usual care. Second, we did not model subsequent lines of intervention (and resulting pain improvement) for individuals who experienced a recurrence of low back pain due to a lack of published evidence on this estimate. The objective of this analysis was to model different treatment alternatives for low back pain and not different treatment pathways. We assumed that pain improvement after recurrence would only occur as spontaneous pain improvement, which was assumed to have the same probability of pain improvement as usual care. Third, the background health care costs for those with improved pain were derived from a claims analysis by Gore et al., which consisted of a control cohort *without* back pain (i.e., not with “improved pain”). Fourth, we assumed 100% adherence to each intervention, which would not necessarily occur in actual practice. Fifth, our base-case cost and cost-effectiveness results for the nonpharmacologic interventions reflect current evidence available on average intervention costs, which may vary widely by region and level of insurance coverage.

CBT intervention costs were based on individual, not group session costs, given the more widespread availability of individual CBT and the lack of data on costs of groups CBT. However, treatment efficacy inputs for CBT came from trials of group CBT. If group CBT became more widely available, costs would be lower than in our base analysis and access would likely be improved.



We examined the budget impact of three interventions, MBSR, yoga, and tai chi, that are not routinely covered by insurance. Our analysis looked at different levels of uptake, and at a high rate of uptake of 50% for the most expensive of the three interventions (MBSR), the additional PMPM cost would be \$0.23. For comparison, this is approximately 5% of the estimated PMPM medication costs for treating pain/inflammation at a large national pharmacy benefits management company.

## 6. Other Benefits and Contextual Considerations

Our reviews seek to provide information on other benefits or disadvantages offered by the intervention to the individual patient, caregivers, the delivery system, other patients, or the public that would not have been considered as part of the evidence on comparative clinical effectiveness. These elements are listed in the table below.

**Table 6.1. Potential Other Benefits or Contextual Considerations**

Potential Other Benefits
This intervention provides significant direct patient health benefits that are not adequately captured by the QALY.
This intervention offers reduced complexity that will significantly improve patient outcomes.
This intervention will reduce important health disparities across racial, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, or regional categories.
This intervention will significantly reduce caregiver or broader family burden.
This intervention offers a novel mechanism of action or approach that will allow successful treatment of many patients who have failed other available treatments.
This intervention will have a significant impact on improving return to work and/or overall productivity.
Other important benefits or disadvantages that should have an important role in judgments of the value of this intervention.
Potential Other Contextual Considerations
This intervention is intended for the care of individuals with a condition of particularly high severity in terms of impact on length of life and/or quality of life.
This intervention is intended for the care of individuals with a condition that represents a particularly high lifetime burden of illness.
This intervention is the first to offer any improvement for patients with this condition.
Compared to usual care, there is significant uncertainty about the long-term risk of serious side effects of this intervention.
Compared to usual care, there is significant uncertainty about the magnitude or durability of the long-term benefits of this intervention.
There are additional contextual considerations that should have an important role in judgments of the value of this intervention.

Although uncertainty remains about the impact of cognitive and mind-body therapies on long-term management of chronic low back and neck pain, these therapies may provide additional benefits that are not adequately captured in the clinical literature. For example, chronic pain has impacts on everyone that the patient touches. Improved management of chronic pain will likely reduce caregiver / family burden. Chronic low back pain, in particular, is a major cause of both short- and long-term disability. The benefits of the mind-body interventions are modest at best, but may help some patients return to work or be more productive at their job. In addition, they may allow some

patients to reduce or stop taking daily opioid therapy to manage their pain, thus reducing the risk for the harms associated with opioid therapy.

As noted in the topic in context section, chronic back and neck pain are common and lead to significant reductions in productivity including patients requiring long-term disability. They are often life-long conditions, so small improvements in function and pain can have a substantial impact on quality of life over many years.

Conversely, the majority of the clinical trials of cognitive and mind-body interventions for chronic pain followed patients for less than a year and no studies evaluated their impact beyond two years. Continued benefits may require ongoing behavior change, for example with ongoing practice of mindfulness, yoga, or tai chi. Long-term behavior change is challenging. Thus, there remains considerable uncertainty about their long-term benefits, although they are unlikely to have any long-term harms.

## 7. Summary of the Votes and Considerations for Policy

### **7.1 About the CTAF Process**

During CTAF public meetings, the CTAF Panel deliberates and votes on key questions related to the systematic review of the clinical evidence, an economic analysis of the applications of treatments under examination, and the supplementary information presented. Panel members are not pre-selected based on the topic being addressed and are intentionally selected to represent a range of expertise and diverse perspectives.

Acknowledging that any judgment of evidence is strengthened by real-life clinical and patient perspectives, subject matter experts are recruited for each meeting topic and provide input to CTAF Panel members before the meeting to help clarify their understanding of the different interventions being analyzed in the evidence review. The same clinical experts serve as a resource to the CTAF Panel during their deliberation, and help to shape recommendations on ways the evidence can apply to policy and practice.

After the CTAF Panel votes, a policy roundtable discussion is held with the CTAF Panel, clinical experts, patient advocates, payers, and when feasible, manufacturers. The goal of this discussion is to bring stakeholders together to apply the evidence to guide patient education, clinical practice, and coverage and public policies. Participants on policy roundtables are selected for their expertise on the specific meeting topic, are different for each meeting, and do not vote on any questions.

At the October 19 meeting, the CTAF Panel discussed issues regarding the application of the available evidence to help patients, clinicians, and payers address important questions related to the use of cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back and neck pain. Following the evidence presentation and public comments (public comments from the meeting can be accessed [here](#) beginning at minute 01:30:18), the CTAF Panel voted on key questions concerning the comparative clinical effectiveness, comparative value, and other benefits and contextual considerations related to cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back and neck pain. These questions are developed by the ICER research team for each assessment to ensure that the questions are framed to address the issues that are most important in applying the evidence to support clinical practice, medical policy decisions, and patient decision-making. The voting results are presented below, along with specific considerations mentioned by CTAF Panel members during the voting process.

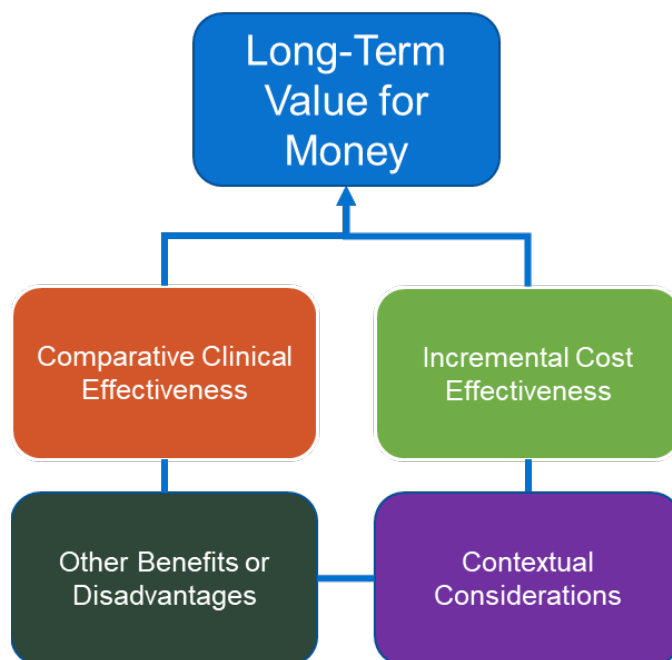
In its deliberations and votes related to value, the CTAF Panel considered the individual patient benefits, and incremental costs to achieve such benefits, from a given intervention over the long term.

There are four elements to consider when deliberating on long-term value for money (see Figure 7.1 below):

1. Comparative clinical effectiveness is a judgment of the overall difference in clinical outcomes between two interventions (or between an intervention and placebo), tempered by the level of certainty possible given the strengths and weaknesses of the body of evidence. CTAF uses the [ICER Evidence Rating Matrix](#) as its conceptual framework for considering comparative clinical effectiveness.
2. Estimated incremental cost-effectiveness is the average incremental cost per patient of one intervention compared to another to achieve a desired “health gain,” such as an additional stroke prevented, case of cancer diagnosed, or gain of a year of life. Alternative interventions are compared in terms of cost per unit of effectiveness, and the resulting comparison is presented as a cost-effectiveness ratio. Relative certainty in the cost and outcome estimates continues to be a consideration. As a measure of cost-effectiveness, the CTAF voting panel follows common academic and health technology assessment standards by using cost per quality-adjusted life year (QALY), with formal voting on “long-term value for money” when the base case incremental cost-effectiveness ratio is between \$50,000 per QALY and \$175,000 per QALY.
3. Other benefits refer to any significant benefits or disadvantages offered by the intervention to the individual patient, caregivers, the delivery system, other patients, or the public that would not have been considered as part of the evidence on comparative clinical effectiveness. Examples of other benefits include better access to treatment centers, mechanisms of treatment delivery that require fewer visits to the clinician’s office, treatments that reduce disparities across various patient groups, and new potential mechanisms of action for treating clinical conditions that have demonstrated low rates of response to currently available therapies. Other disadvantages could include increased burden of treatment on patients or their caregivers. For each intervention evaluated, it will be open to discussion whether other benefits or disadvantages such as these are important enough to factor into the overall judgment of long-term value for money. There is no quantitative measure for other benefits or disadvantages.
4. Contextual considerations include ethical, legal, or other issues (but not cost) that influence the relative priority of illnesses and interventions. Examples of contextual considerations include whether there are currently any existing treatments for the condition, whether the

condition severely affects quality of life or not, and whether there is significant uncertainty about the magnitude of benefit or risk of an intervention over the long term. There is no quantitative measure for contextual considerations.

**Figure 7.1. Conceptual Structure of Long-term Value for Money**



## 7.2 Voting Results

No long-term value for money vote was required for yoga, as it had incremental cost-effectiveness ratios below \$50,000 per QALY gained, indicating that it is a high-value intervention by default. While a value vote was taken on MBSR during the meeting, subsequent revisions to the report resulted in cost-effectiveness ratios below \$50,000 per QALY gained, so it is presumed to be a high-value intervention. There was also no long-term value vote taken for tai chi, as the majority of the panel judged that the evidence was inadequate to demonstrate a net health benefit for tai chi added to usual care versus usual care alone (question 5).

1) For individuals with chronic low back pain, is the evidence adequate to demonstrate that **acupuncture** provides additional net health benefit when **added to usual care**?

Yes: 14 votes	No: 0 votes
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**Comments:** In written and verbal comments, Panel members noted that despite the clinical trials demonstrating similar benefit between acupuncture and sham acupuncture, the evidence convincingly demonstrated small improvements in pain and function and a near-

complete lack of harms associated with acupuncture compared with commonly-used treatments for chronic low back pain (e.g., surgery and opioids). One Panel member noted that the causes of chronic pain are multifactorial, and it is possible that a subset of patients may respond particularly well to acupuncture.

2) For individuals with chronic low back pain, is the evidence adequate to demonstrate that **cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)** provides additional net health benefit when **added to usual care**?

Yes: 14 votes	No: 0 votes
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**Comments:** Panel members judged the evidence demonstrate at least a small health benefit with no demonstrated harms.

3) For individuals with chronic low back pain, is the evidence adequate to demonstrate that **mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)** provides additional net health benefit when **added to usual care**?

Yes: 14 votes	No: 0 votes
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**Comments:** Panel members noted similar considerations in their votes on MBSR as in CBT.

4) For individuals with chronic low back pain, is the evidence adequate to demonstrate that **yoga** provides additional net health benefit when **added to usual care**?

Yes: 14 votes	No: 0 votes
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**Comments:** As in their other votes, Panel members judged the evidence to demonstrate at least small health benefits with minimal to no harms. One Panel member noted some concern about whether yoga for chronic back pain could be standardized, but ultimately voted in the affirmative because there is likely to be a patient subpopulation that would respond particularly well to yoga.

5) For individuals with chronic low back pain, is the evidence adequate to demonstrate that **tai chi** provides additional net health benefit when **added to usual care**?

Yes: 6 votes	No: 8 votes
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**Comments:** In contrast to their other votes, a majority of the Panel judged the current evidence base for tai chi to be insufficient. Those voting “no” identified challenges in generalizing the trial results to a broader population of patients with chronic pain, and argued that while the evidence does indicate a small health benefit with few risks, there was inadequate evidence to confirm these findings. Panel members who voted “yes”

acknowledged the smaller body of evidence, but argued that tai chi had a highly favorable risk-benefit ratio. One Panel member noted that tai chi may be more appropriate for older populations or those with physical limitations, since it is less physically demanding than yoga.

6) For individuals with chronic low back pain, is the evidence adequate to distinguish the additional net health benefits provided by **acupuncture, CBT, MBSR, yoga, and tai chi**?

Yes: 3 votes	<b>No: 11 votes</b>
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**Comments:** Panel members who voted “no” highlighted the paucity of head-to-head trials of these interventions, noting that the causes of chronic low back pain are heterogeneous and that the evidence is not sufficient to demonstrate whether any one of these therapies works better for a given patient subpopulation. One panel member who voted “yes” felt that there were sufficient differences in functional outcomes across the interventions to distinguishing them from one another.

7) Given the available evidence on comparative effectiveness and incremental cost-effectiveness, and considering other benefits, disadvantages, and contextual considerations, what is the long-term value for money of treatment with **acupuncture and usual care** versus **usual care alone** for patients with chronic low back pain?

Low: 1 votes	<b>Intermediate: 11 votes</b>	High: 2 votes
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**Comments:** Several Panel members voted “intermediate” instead of “low” value due to substantial uncertainty in the evidence base and concerns about the large placebo effect in clinical trials; these same concerns led one Panel member to a “low” vote. Panel members identified significant other benefits to patients, such as the likelihood that improved pain management would reduce caregiver burden, and the potential for reduced use of opioids. The lack of other effective treatments with few risks for chronic low back pain was viewed as an important contextual consideration. One panel member who voted “intermediate” value voiced concerns about potential overutilization and harms to patients if their acupuncturist is not adequately trained. One panel member who voted “high” noted that cost-effectiveness ratios for acupuncture were close to \$50,000 per QALY gained, and would likely be higher in some scenarios.

8) Given the available evidence on comparative effectiveness and incremental cost-effectiveness, and considering other benefits, disadvantages, and contextual considerations, what is the long-term value for money of treatment with **CBT and usual care** versus **usual care alone** for patients with chronic low back pain?

Low: 0 votes	<b>Intermediate: 13 votes</b>	High: 1 votes
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**Comments:** The majority of the Panel judged CBT to represent intermediate value, a vote that was driven primarily by the higher incremental cost-effectiveness ratios for CBT as compared to those of the other interventions under review. Several panel members highlighted significant other benefits associated with CBT, including those raised during their votes on the previous question, as well as reductions in depression and the broad applicability of the techniques patients learn to other health goals such as smoking cessation. One Panel member noted as a positive that because CBT is a one-time course that teaches coping skills, it represents a move away from the model of providing open-ended therapy over the long-term.

9) For individuals with chronic neck pain, is the evidence adequate to demonstrate that **acupuncture** provides additional net health benefit when **added to usual care**?

Yes: 11 votes	No: 3 votes
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**Comments:** A majority of Panel members voted “yes,” arguing that despite there being less evidence on acupuncture’s use in chronic neck pain as in chronic low back pain, the treatment is associated with negligible harms. Several panel members noted that the risks of neck surgery are far greater than those for back surgery, which made the risk-benefit ratio for acupuncture even more favorable as compared to its use in chronic low back pain.

## 7.3 Roundtable Discussion and Key Policy Implications

Following its deliberation on the evidence, the CTAF Panel engaged in a moderated discussion with a policy roundtable about how best to apply the evidence on cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back and neck pain to policy and practice. The policy roundtable members included two patient advocates, two clinical experts, a private insurer, and a public insurer. The discussion reflected multiple perspectives and opinions, and therefore, none of the statements below should be taken as a consensus view held by all participants. The names of the Policy Roundtable participants are shown below, and conflict of interest disclosures for all meeting participants can be found in Appendix G.

**Table 7.1 Policy Roundtable Members**

Name	Title and Affiliation
Penney Cowan	Founder and CEO, American Chronic Pain Association
Catherine Cartwright	Patient; Regional Director, American Chronic Pain Association
Julia Logan, MD, MPH	Chief Quality Officer, California Department of Health Care Services
Ravi Prasad, PhD	Associate Chief, Division of Pain Medicine; Clinical Associate Professor, Anesthesiology, Perioperative and Pain Medicine; Director, Stanford Comprehensive Interdisciplinary Pain Program; Stanford University School of Medicine
Robert Saper, MD	Director of Integrative Medicine, Boston Medical Center; Associate Professor of Family Medicine, Boston University
Tony Van Goor, MD, MMM, CPE, FACP	Senior Director, Medical Affairs and Medical Director for Policy and Health Technology Assessment, Blue Shield of California

The roundtable discussion was facilitated by Dr. Steven Pearson, MD, MSc, President of ICER. The main themes and recommendations from the discussion are organized by audience and summarized below.

## Payers

### Chronic Low Back Pain

***The strength of evidence appears adequate to support coverage of acupuncture, CBT, MBSR, and yoga for chronic low back pain. Evidence is far weaker for tai chi.***

CBT and MBSR protocols are the most standardized among these non-drug management options. An evidence-based approach to determining the intensity and duration of covered treatment for all modalities can be derived from the protocols used in key clinical trials (see table below), although yoga presents unique challenges due to the lack of standard licensing of providers and the variety of yoga traditions. Sample evidence-based coverage policies for each modality are presented separately on the following pages.

**Table 7.2. Frequency and Duration of Therapies for Low Back Pain in Key Clinical Trials**

Intervention	Frequency and Intensity	Reference
<b>Acupuncture</b>	Two 15- to 20-minute sessions/week for three weeks followed by one 15- to 20-minute session/week for four weeks	Cherkin et al., 2009 <sup>11</sup>
<b>CBT</b>	One two-hour group session/week for eight weeks	Cherkin et al., 2016 <sup>12</sup>
<b>MBSR</b>	One two-hour group session/week for eight weeks plus optional 6-hour retreat	Cherkin et al., 2016 <sup>12</sup>
<b>Yoga</b>	One 75-minute session/week for 12 weeks	Sherman et al., 2011 <sup>13</sup>
<b>Tai Chi</b>	Two 40-minute sessions/week for eight weeks followed by one 40-minute session/week for two weeks	Hall et al., 2011 <sup>14</sup>

CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction

- ***Evidence-based boundaries on duration of therapy and on repetitive courses of therapy are reasonable given the potential for inappropriate overuse of services.***

The clinical trials demonstrated continued benefits for up to one to two years following treatment. Retreatment with a full course of therapy is not indicated for CBT, MBSR, yoga or tai chi as patients should have learned skills that they continue to incorporate into their daily lives. There were no trials of maintenance therapy, but a short refresher course of therapy may be appropriate to reinforce these skills. Acupuncture may have different requirements because it cannot be part of a patient's daily activities at home. However, no studies of acupuncture have demonstrated benefits of ongoing therapy for low back pain compared to a limited course of treatment.

- ***Because patients may have strong preferences and be inclined to respond favorably to some, but not all, of these management options, payers should consider covering all of these cognitive and mind-body options to maximize the chances for positive outcomes.***
- ***There is no evidence on the concurrent use of multiple modalities, so payers may wish to consider requests for concurrent treatment on a case-by-case basis.***
- ***Coverage policies for these treatments options should be clear and efficient so that providers can order these therapies as easily as they order physical therapy or a pain medication.***

Coverage for these cognitive and mind-body therapies may serve as a complement to insurer's efforts to combat the opioid epidemic. At least two plans in California have substantially reduced opioid prescriptions by covering and promoting acupuncture and chiropractic care as covered benefits as part of their comprehensive approach to opioid therapy management.<sup>98</sup>

- ***Coverage for these modalities should ideally be part of the regular medical benefit to enhance integration across providers and minimize the risk of bureaucratic barriers to access.***

In some regions, mental health coverage has been "carved out" and administered by other payers, which can decrease access to such services. Payers should take actions that facilitate access to cognitive and mind-body therapies through primary care practices, and should ensure that financial incentives do not encourage access restrictions.

- ***Reimbursement for cognitive and mind-body therapies needs to be adequate to support a robust network of providers.***

There are concerns that there are areas of the country with inadequate numbers of providers of these therapies to meet the needs of the large population of patients with chronic low back and neck pain. In addition, there are regions of the country with large numbers of providers, but few who accept insurance coverage due to low reimbursement rates. Medi-Cal currently reimburses acupuncture treatment at \$5.79 for a 15-minute visit, which may be inadequate to motivate providers to treat Medi-Cal patients. More appropriate reimbursement would also likely improve the accessibility of these therapies to low income patients, who often have difficulty affording out-of-pocket costs for services not covered by insurance.

### **Sample Draft Coverage Policy for Acupuncture for Chronic Low Back Pain**

**Patient criteria:** Adults with at least 3 months of low back pain that is not adequately controlled with non-opioid analgesics and physical therapy. Coverage may also be considered for patients with 8 weeks of severe pain despite conservative treatment for whom opioid treatment is being considered.

**Provider criteria:** Licensed acupuncturist with experience in treatment of musculoskeletal pain.

**Intensity and Duration:** Up to ten 20-minute sessions over a seven-week period.

**Concurrent treatment:** There is no evidence on the combination of acupuncture with other cognitive or mind-body therapies.

### **Sample Draft Coverage Policy for CBT for Chronic Low Back Pain**

**Patient criteria:** Adults with at least 3 months of low back pain that is not adequately controlled with non-opioid analgesics and physical therapy. Coverage may also be considered for patients with 8 weeks of severe pain despite conservative treatment for whom opioid treatment is being considered.

**Provider criteria:** Licensed PhD-level Psychologist with experience in group CBT for chronic pain.

**Intensity and Duration:** One two-hour group session for 8 weeks

**Concurrent treatment:** There is no evidence on the combination of CBT with other cognitive or mind-body therapies.

### **Sample Draft Coverage Policy for MBSR for Chronic Low Back Pain**

**Patient criteria:** Adults with at least 3 months of low back pain that is not adequately controlled with non-opioid analgesics and physical therapy. Coverage may also be considered for patients with 8 weeks of severe pain despite conservative treatment for whom opioid treatment is being considered.

**Provider criteria:** Training certificate from recognized MBSR program. Instructors should be trained to lead groups in Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction.

**Intensity and Duration:** One two-hour group session for 8 weeks.

**Concurrent treatment:** There is no evidence on the combination of MBSR with other cognitive or mind-body therapies.

## Sample Draft Coverage Policy for Yoga for Chronic Low Back Pain

**Patient criteria:** Adults with at least 3 months of low back pain that is not adequately controlled with non-opioid analgesics and physical therapy. Coverage may also be considered for patients with 8 weeks of severe pain despite conservative treatment for whom opioid treatment is being considered.

**Provider criteria:** There is no central body certifying instructors in yoga therapy. In the absence of evidence-based certification, it may be reasonable to limit yoga therapy to centers of excellence in pain management that have established their own network of yoga providers.

**Intensity and Duration:** One 75-minute session per week for 12 weeks.

**Concurrent treatment:** There is no evidence on the combination of yoga with other cognitive or mind-body therapies.

## Chronic Neck Pain

***Given that there is far less evidence on the effectiveness of these cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic neck pain than for chronic low back pain, payers may wish to assess requests for coverage on a case-by-case basis.***

Evidence may not directly translate from patients with chronic low back pain. Some evidence and clinical expert opinion suggests that chronic neck pain is more challenging to treat than low back pain and harms of invasive therapies for neck pain may be greater than when similar interventions are used for low back pain.

## Provider Groups

***Integrate multiple options for cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back pain into local practices.***

Provider groups can take the lead in identifying high quality providers and integrating them into their practices to facilitate referrals from and communication with primary care providers. This would complement and support efforts by specialty societies to credential appropriately trained providers and payers' efforts to establish networks of high quality providers. They can also educate providers in appropriate shared decision-making that includes expectations of the benefits of these therapies (improved function, reduced suffering, but not complete relief of pain for most patients).

## Specialty Societies

### ***Develop clear guidelines for the use of cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back and neck pain.***

Payers want evidence-based guidelines to support their coverage policies. Such guidelines are lacking for these five cognitive and mind-body therapies. Guidelines should highlight the frequency and length of therapies as well as appropriate indications. Yoga and tai chi in particular would benefit from evidence-based standardization of their therapeutic approach for chronic pain, with the interventions from the high quality trials identified for this report serving as a starting point.<sup>73,83</sup>

### ***Develop appropriate licensing and credentialing criteria for practitioners certified to deliver these interventions for chronic low back pain.***

Payers hope to ensure to high quality care, in part, by limiting coverage to licensed providers. Certification varies across locations and modalities. For instance, acupuncture has licensure requirements in most states in the US, while yoga typically has no such certifications. If credentialing does not occur, payers may need to identify specific centers of excellence where certain modalities can be administered.

### ***Educate providers about the value of cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back pain.***

These interventions have modest benefits, but essentially no harms. This education could be linked to efforts to reduce low value care in support of the Choosing Wisely recommendations (e.g. overutilization of spine imaging) or linked to efforts to reduce inappropriate use of opioid therapy for chronic pain.

## Researchers

### ***Promote long-term studies of functional outcomes for these interventions***

The longest study follow-up that was identified in the systematic review was two years in duration and the majority of trials were shorter than one year. Since chronic pain is often a life-long problem, studies of 3 to 5 years duration would help to evaluate the long-term efficacy of these interventions as well as potential benefits of intermittent retreatment with these interventions. Additionally, pragmatic trials will be helpful in assessing the effectiveness of these therapies in the real world.

***Study the efficacy of these interventions at reducing or eliminating the use of opioid therapy in patients with chronic pain***

There was a conspicuous lack of reporting on reductions in pain medication use as an outcome, even in patients taking daily opioid therapy.

***Study predictors of response to therapy.***

It is unclear which of these interventions works best for specific subsets of patients with chronic pain. Larger studies of these interventions with robust baseline data on patient characteristics should be used to identify predictors of response to therapy to allow clinicians to better target the best cognitive or mind-body intervention for an individual patient.

***Study the dose response effect of these therapies and the incremental effectiveness of concurrent treatment with multiple modalities.***

In clinical practice there is a wide range of frequency and intensity of the application of cognitive and mind-body therapies for patients with chronic pain. Studies to better delineate the appropriate intensity of therapy would help to advance the field.

***Perform additional high-quality trials of these therapies for chronic neck pain***

We found a lack of evidence for most mind-body therapies for patients with chronic neck pain, leading to uncertainty in our assessments of the comparative effectiveness and cost effectiveness of these therapies for this population.

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This is the first CTAF review of cognitive and mind-body therapies for chronic low back and neck pain.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A. Search Strategies and Results

**Table A1. PRISMA 2009 Checklist**

	#	Checklist Item
<b>TITLE</b>		
<b>Title</b>	1	Identify the report as a systematic review, meta-analysis, or both.
<b>ABSTRACT</b>		
<b>Structured Summary</b>	2	Provide a structured summary including, as applicable: background; objectives; data sources; study eligibility criteria, participants, and interventions; study appraisal and synthesis methods; results; limitations; conclusions and implications of key findings; systematic review registration number.
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>		
<b>Rationale</b>	3	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of what is already known.
<b>Objectives</b>	4	Provide an explicit statement of questions being addressed with reference to participants, interventions, comparisons, outcomes, and study design (PICOS).
<b>METHODS</b>		
<b>Protocol and Registration</b>	5	Indicate if a review protocol exists, if and where it can be accessed (e.g., Web address), and, if available, provide registration information including registration number.
<b>Eligibility Criteria</b>	6	Specify study characteristics (e.g., PICOS, length of follow-up) and report characteristics (e.g., years considered, language, publication status) used as criteria for eligibility, giving rationale.
<b>Information Sources</b>	7	Describe all information sources (e.g., databases with dates of coverage, contact with study authors to identify additional studies) in the search and date last searched.
<b>Search</b>	8	Present full electronic search strategy for at least one database, including any limits used, such that it could be repeated.
<b>Study Selection</b>	9	State the process for selecting studies (i.e., screening, eligibility, included in systematic review, and, if applicable, included in the meta-analysis).
<b>Data Collection Process</b>	10	Describe method of data extraction from reports (e.g., piloted forms, independently, in duplicate) and any processes for obtaining and confirming data from investigators.
<b>Data Items</b>	11	List and define all variables for which data were sought (e.g., PICOS, funding sources) and any assumptions and simplifications made.
<b>Risk of Bias in Individual Studies</b>	12	Describe methods used for assessing risk of bias of individual studies (including specification of whether this was done at the study or outcome level), and how this information is to be used in any data synthesis.



<b>Summary Measures</b>	13	State the principal summary measures (e.g., risk ratio, difference in means).
<b>Synthesis of Results</b>	14	Describe the methods of handling data and combining results of studies, if done, including measures of consistency (e.g., $I^2$ ) for each meta-analysis.
<b>Risk of Bias Across Studies</b>	15	Specify any assessment of risk of bias that may affect the cumulative evidence (e.g., publication bias, selective reporting within studies).
<b>Additional Analyses</b>	16	Describe methods of additional analyses (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression), if done, indicating which were pre-specified.
<b>RESULTS</b>		
<b>Study Selection</b>	17	Give numbers of studies screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the review, with reasons for exclusions at each stage, ideally with a flow diagram.
<b>Study Characteristics</b>	18	For each study, present characteristics for which data were extracted (e.g., study size, PICOS, follow-up period) and provide the citations.
<b>Risk of Bias within Studies</b>	19	Present data on risk of bias of each study and, if available, any outcome level assessment (see item 12).
<b>Results of Individual Studies</b>	20	For all outcomes considered (benefits or harms), present, for each study: (a) simple summary data for each intervention group (b) effect estimates and confidence intervals, ideally with a forest plot.
<b>Synthesis of Results</b>	21	Present results of each meta-analysis done, including confidence intervals and measures of consistency.
<b>Risk of Bias Across Studies</b>	22	Present results of any assessment of risk of bias across studies (see Item 15).
<b>Additional Analysis</b>	23	Give results of additional analyses, if done (e.g., sensitivity or subgroup analyses, meta-regression [see Item 16]).
<b>DISCUSSION</b>		
<b>Summary of Evidence</b>	24	Summarize the main findings including the strength of evidence for each main outcome; consider their relevance to key groups (e.g., healthcare providers, users, and policy makers).
<b>Limitations</b>	25	Discuss limitations at study and outcome level (e.g., risk of bias), and at review-level (e.g., incomplete retrieval of identified research, reporting bias).
<b>Conclusions</b>	26	Provide a general interpretation of the results in the context of other evidence, and implications for future research.
<b>FUNDING</b>		
<b>Funding</b>	27	Describe sources of funding for the systematic review and other support (e.g., supply of data); role of funders for the systematic review.

From: Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, Altman DG. The PRISMA Group (2009). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement. PLoS Med 6(6): e1000097. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed1000097

**Table A2. Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials Search, June 3, 2017 (via Ovid)**

1	Exp low back pain/
2	back pain or lumbago
3	tai chi
4	acupuncture
5	Exp tai ji/
6	Exp cognitive therapy/
7	Exp mindfulness/
8	mindfulness
9	(1 or 2) and (3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7 or 8)
10	Exp neck pain/
11	cervicalgia or cervicodynia
12	(10 or 11) and (3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7 or 8)

**Table A3. Chronic Low Back Pain Since ACP/AHRQ Review: PubMed, June 5, 2017**

#1	((("Low Back Pain"[Mesh] OR ("low back" AND pain) OR "spinal stenosis"[mh] OR "spinal stenosis" OR "spinal stenoses" OR "radiculopathy"[mh] OR radiculopathy OR radicular OR "back injuries"[mh] OR "back injury" OR "back injuries" OR "spinal injuries"[mh] OR "spinal injury" OR "spinal injuries"))
#2	#1 AND ("Cognitive therapy"[mh] OR "cognition therapy" OR "Cognition Therapies" OR "Cognitive Behavior Therapy" OR "Cognitive Psychotherapy" OR "Cognitive Psychotherapies" OR "Cognitive Behavior Therapies" OR "Cognitive Behavioral Therapy" OR "Cognitive Behavioral Therapies" OR "yoga"[mh] OR yoga[tiab] OR "Tai Ji"[Mesh] OR Tai-ji OR Tai Chi OR Tai Ji Quan OR Taiji OR Taijiquan OR T'ai Chi OR Tai Chi Chuan OR "Acupuncture Therapy"[mh] OR "Acupuncture"[mh] OR acupuncture[tiab] OR Pharmacopuncture OR Pharmacopuncture))
#3	( "2015/04/27"[PDat] : "3000/12/31"[PDat] )) AND (randomized controlled trial[Publication Type] OR (randomized[Title/Abstract] AND controlled[Title/Abstract] AND trial[Title/Abstract]))
#4	#2 AND #3

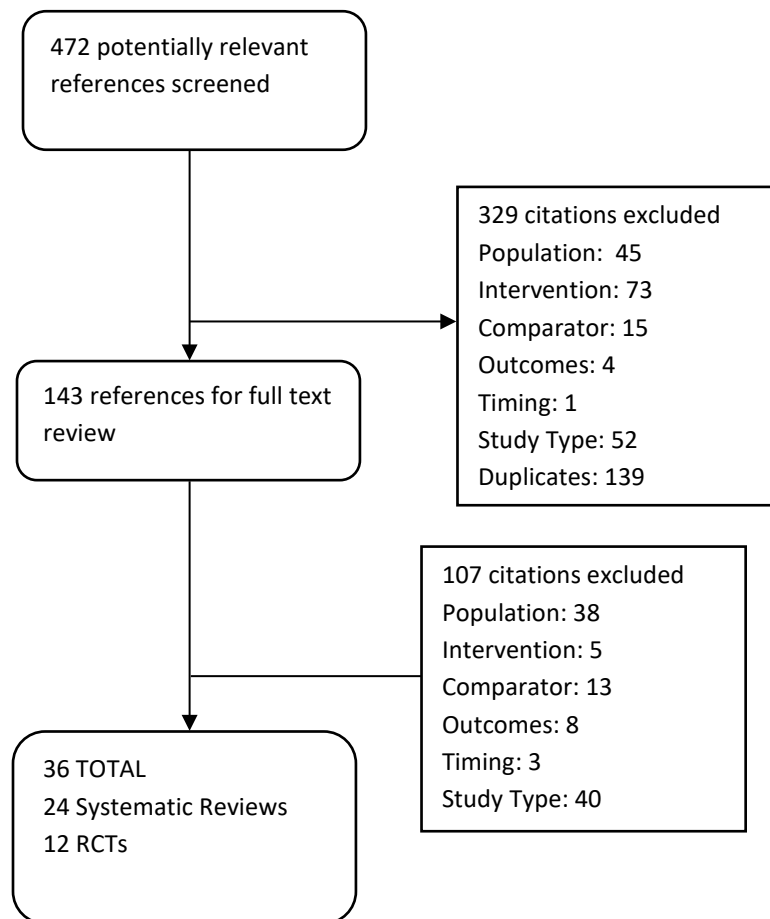
**Table A4. Systematic Reviews of Chronic Neck Pain: PubMed, June 5, 2017**

#1	systematic review [ti] OR meta-analysis [pt] OR meta-analysis [ti] OR systematic literature review [ti] OR this systematic review [tw] OR pooling project [tw] OR OR meta synthesis [ti] OR meta-analy*[ti] OR integrative review [tw] OR integrative research review [tw] OR rapid review [tw] OR umbrella review [tw] OR consensus development conference [pt] OR practice guideline [pt] OR drug class reviews [ti] OR cochrane database syst rev [ta] OR acp journal club [ta] OR health technol assess [ta] OR evid rep technol assess summ [ta] OR jbi database system rev implement rep [ta]
#2	clinical guideline [tw] AND management [tw]
#3	(evidence based[ti] OR evidence-based medicine [mh] OR best practice* [ti] OR evidence synthesis [tiab]) AND (review [pt] OR diseases category[mh] OR behavior and behavior mechanisms [mh] OR therapeutics [mh] OR evaluation studies[pt] OR validation studies[pt] OR guideline [pt] OR pmcbook)
#4	(systematic [tw] OR systematically [tw] OR critical [tiab] OR (study selection [tw]) OR (predetermined [tw] OR inclusion [tw] AND criteri* [tw]) OR exclusion criteri* [tw] OR main outcome measures [tw] OR standard of care [tw] OR standards of care [tw]) AND (survey [tiab] OR surveys [tiab] OR overview* [tw] OR review [tiab] OR reviews [tiab] OR search* [tw] OR handsearch [tw] OR analysis [ti] OR critique [tiab] OR appraisal [tw] OR (reduction [tw]AND (risk [mh] OR risk [tw]) AND (death OR recurrence)
#5	#1 OR #2 OR #3 OR #4
#6	literature [tiab] OR articles [tiab] OR publications [tiab] OR publication [tiab] OR bibliography [tiab] OR bibliographies [tiab] OR published [tiab] OR pooled data [tw] OR unpublished [tw] OR citation [tw] OR citations [tw] OR database [tiab] OR internet [tiab] OR textbooks [tiab] OR references [tw] OR scales [tw] OR papers [tw] OR datasets [tw] OR trials [tiab] OR meta-analy* [tw] OR (clinical [tiab] AND studies [tiab]) OR treatment outcome [mh] OR treatment outcome [tw] OR pmcbook
#7	#5 AND #6
#8	(letter [pt] OR newspaper article [pt])
#9	#7 NOT #8
#10	"Neck Pain"[mh] OR "Neck Pains" OR "Neck Ache" OR "Neck Aches" OR "Cervicalgia" OR "Cervicalgias" OR "Cervicodynia" OR "Cervicodynias" OR "Neckache" OR "Neckaches" OR "Cervical Pain" OR "Cervical Pains"
#11	"Cognitive therapy"[mh] OR "cognition therapy" OR "Cognition Therapies" OR "Cognitive Behavior Therapy" OR "Cognitive Psychotherapy" OR "Cognitive Psychotherapies" OR "Cognitive Behavior Therapies" OR "Cognitive Behavioral Therapy" OR "Cognitive Behavioral Therapies" OR "yoga"[mh] OR yoga[tiab] OR "Tai Ji"[Mesh] OR Tai-ji OR Tai Chi OR Tai Ji Quan OR Taiji OR Taijiquan OR T'ai Chi OR Tai Chi Chuan OR "Acupuncture Therapy"[mh] OR "Acupuncture"[mh] OR acupuncture[tiab] OR Pharmacopuncture OR Pharmacopuncture
#12	#10 AND #11
#13	#9 AND #12

**Table A5. Embase, July 2, 2017**

#1	'low back pain'/exp OR (('low back' OR 'lumbosacral region'/exp) AND 'chronic pain'/exp) OR 'pain'/exp OR pain OR 'lumbar spinal stenosis'/exp OR 'spinal stenosis'/exp OR 'spinal stenosis' OR 'spinal stenoses' OR 'radiculopathy'/exp OR radiculopathy OR radicular OR ('musculoskeletal injury'/exp AND 'lumbar region'/exp) OR 'back injury'/exp OR 'back injury' OR 'back injuries'/exp OR 'back injuries' OR 'spinal injury'/exp OR 'spinal injury' OR 'spinal injuries'/exp OR 'spinal injuries'
#2	'cognitive behavioral therapy'/exp OR 'cognition therapy' OR 'Cognitive Behavior Therapy' OR 'Cognitive Psychotherapy' OR 'Cognitive Psychotherapies' OR 'Cognitive Behavior Therapies' OR 'Cognitive Behavioral Therapy' OR 'Cognitive Behavioral Therapies'
#3	'mindfulness'/exp OR mindfulness OR 'stress reduction' OR 'psychotherapy'/exp OR psychotherapy
#4	'yoga'/exp OR 'yoga':ab,ti
#5	'Tai Chi'/exp OR Tai-ji OR 'Tai Chi' OR 'Tai Ji Quan' OR Taiji OR Taijiquan OR 'Tai Chi Chuan'
#6	'acupuncture'/exp OR 'acupunctur':ab,ti
#7	Pharmacoacupuncture OR Pharmacopuncture OR 'alternative medicine'/exp OR 'Complementary Medicine' OR 'Alternative Medicine' OR 'Alternative Therapies' OR CAM
#8	#2 OR #3 OR #4 OR #5 OR #6 OR #7
#9	#1 AND #8
#10	[2015-2017]/py
#11	[(controlled clinical trial]/lim OR [randomized controlled trial]/lim)
#12	#10 AND #11
#13	#9 AND #12

**Figure A1. PRISMA Flow Chart Showing Results of Literature Search for Cognitive and Mind-Body Therapies for Chronic Low Back and Neck Pain**



## Appendix B. Health Technology Assessments

### **CADTH<sup>99-101</sup>**

CADTH has produced multiple reviews of guidelines on treating chronic pain, including the use of behavioral and psychological therapies. A review on the clinical and economic evidence surrounding multidisciplinary biopsychosocial treatment for chronic pain<sup>99</sup> found that the clinical benefit was moderate, with statistically significant differences compared with controls. However, the treatment effect was not consistent across outcomes. No economic reviews were identified.

CADTH reviewed the clinical evidence for the optimal frequency of acupuncture used to treat chronic shoulder and lower back pain.<sup>101</sup> The review concluded that acupuncture is practiced with varying frequency and that a systematic review assessing impacts of treatment methods on outcomes would be useful in future research. CADTH recommends that determining frequency of acupuncture sessions should be done on an individual patient basis, based on the severity of pain.

In 2012, CADTH also reviewed mindfulness training for chronic pain management.<sup>100</sup> Given the low-quality and sparse evidence base, no conclusions regarding the clinical benefit of mindfulness training could be drawn.

### **NICE<sup>102</sup>**

The National Guideline Centre produced a systematic review and resulting set of guidelines on the clinical and economic benefits of a variety of non-invasive treatments, including acupuncture/electrotherapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, yoga, and mindfulness for low back pain with or without sciatica.

Acupuncture was not recommended as a treatment option for low back pain, primarily because its treatment effect cannot be distinguished from sham acupuncture.

CBT was recommended in combination with an active exercise therapy, with or without additional manipulative (massage, mobilization, etc.) therapies. Given the small size of the evidence base, CBT was recommended as an optional component to a treatment plan, but there was not enough evidence to determine its potential net health benefit. Cost-effectiveness evidence was also limited, so CBT was considered cost effective only when combined with physical exercise modalities. Given the very limited evidence on clinical effectiveness of mindfulness and no evidence on cost effectiveness, mindfulness was neither recommended nor not recommended by NICE.

Mind-body exercise (including yoga and tai chi) was recommended as a consideration for patients with chronic low back pain, particularly when patients preferred or requested the intervention. With mixed evidence, mind-body exercise was found to have at least small benefits compared with usual care and exercise therapy. They found that the costs of yoga and tai chi were dependent on the number of sessions provided and that individual instruction was generally more expensive than group classes. NICE summarized a previous economic evaluation that found group yoga to be cost-

effective compared to usual care. They found no direct evidence on the effect of individual versus group yoga.

## Appendix C. Ongoing Studies

Title, Trial Sponsor, Clinicaltrials.gov Identifier	Study Design	Treatment Arms	Patient Population	Key Outcomes	Estimated Completion Date
<b>Predicting Analgesic Response to Acupuncture: A Practical Approach</b>  <b>Stanford University, National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health</b>  <a href="#">NCT02890810</a>	RCT Parallel Assignment Double Blind N=100	1) Verum Electroacupuncture  2) Placebo Electroacupuncture	Age 21-65 English fluency Chronic low back pain for $\geq 6$ months Average pain over the last month $\geq 5/10$  <u>Exclusion</u> Radicular low back pain Pending litigation or Worker's compensation related to low back pain Pregnant/planning to become pregnant American Society of Anesthesiologist class III or above physical status Mental health or medical conditions that would interfere with study procedures opioids $\geq 60$ mg morphine equivalent units/day, benzodiazepines, corticosteroids Bleeding disorders Acupuncture treatment in past 10 years	<u>Primary</u> Mean back pain intensity on 11-point NRS (7 days) Roland Morris Disability Questionnaire (1 day)  <u>Secondary</u> Quantitative sensory testing Physical exam to determine neurological function, lumbar facet irritation, lumbar spine range of motion Blood pressure Heart rate variability	July 2018 (final data collection date for primary outcome)



<b>Sinew Acupuncture for Neck Pain: Randomized Controlled Trial</b>  <b>The University of Hong Kong</b>  <a href="#">NCT02834702</a>	RCT Parallel Assignment Single Blind N=130	1) Sinew acupuncture  2) Sham acupuncture	Age ≥18 Able to read and write Chinese Pain between neck and shoulder; movement or palpation of the cervical region provokes symptoms Pain duration ≥3 months VAS (0-100 mm) pain score ≥30 mm at baseline No treatments for pain management received in past 2 weeks  <u>Exclusion</u> History of neck fracture/surgery Malignant tumor Cervical congenital abnormality Severe psychiatric illness Needle phobia Acupuncture in past 3 months Other acupuncture contraindications	<u>Primary</u> VAS (3 weeks)  <u>Secondary</u> VAS Northwick Park Neck Pain Questionnaire SF-36	June 2020
<b>Strategies to Assist with Management of Pain (STAMP)</b>  <b>University of Wisconsin, Madison &amp; Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute</b>  <a href="#">NCT03115359</a>	RCT Parallel Assignment Single blind N=766	1) Mindfulness meditation  2) Cognitive behavioral therapy	English-speaking Age ≥21 Chronic low back pain ≥30 mg/day of morphine-equivalent dose for ≥3 months ≥21 on Oswestry Disability Index  <u>Exclusion</u> Prior mindfulness meditation or CBT training Current pregnancy Borderline personality, delusional, or bipolar disorder	<u>Primary</u> Pain intensity (baseline to 12 months) using Brief Pain Inventory Physical function (baseline to 12 months) using Oswestry Disability Index  <u>Secondary</u> SF-12 Daily opioid dose	July 2021

<b>Mindfulness-Oriented Recovery Enhancement for Chronic Pain and Prescription Opioid Misuse in Primary Care</b>  <b>University of Utah</b>  <a href="#">NCT02602535</a>	RCT Parallel Assignment Single blind N=260	1) Mindfulness-oriented recovery enhancement  2) Support group	Age ≥18 Current back pain diagnosis Current use of prescription opioid agonist or mixed agonist-antagonist analgesics for >90 days  <u>Exclusion</u> Prior experience with mindfulness-based stress reduction, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, or mindfulness-based relapse prevention Active suicidality, schizophrenia, psychotic disorder, and/or substance dependence Clinically unstable systemic illness judged to interfere with treatment	<u>Primary</u> Change in opioid misuse (baseline to 6 months post-treatment) Change in pain severity and interference (baseline to 6 months post-treatment) using Brief Pain Inventory  <u>Secondary</u> Change in opioid craving Change in psychological distress (Depression Anxiety Stress Scale) Change in opioid dose	October 2021
<b>Mechanisms of Psychosocial Chronic Pain Treatments</b>  <b>Rush University Medical Center, Duke University, &amp; University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa</b>  <a href="#">NCT02133976</a>	RCT Parallel Assignment Single Blind N=400	1) Cognitive therapy  2) Mindfulness training  3) Behavior therapy  4) Treatment as usual	Daily chronic pain intensity (≥4 on 10-point scale) and interference in performing daily activities due to pain (≥3 on 6-point scale) for ≥6 months Musculoskeletal pain of low back and/or leg pain that may be related to history of degenerative disk disease, spinal stenosis, or disk herniation, or muscular or ligamentous strain Age 18-75  <u>Exclusion</u> Alcohol/substance abuse Psychotic or bipolar disorders Inadequate English Active suicidal ideation Pain due to malignant conditions, migraine/tension headache, fibromyalgia, or complex regional pain syndrome	<u>Primary</u> Pain interference (12 months)  <u>Secondary</u> Activity level	September 2018 (final data collection date for primary outcome)

<b>Stanford Center for Back Pain</b>  <b>Stanford University</b>  <a href="#">NCT02503475</a>	RCT Parallel Assignment Double Blind N=324	<u>Project 1</u> 1) Attention Regulation 2) Cognitive Regulation 3) Sham 4) Free Strategy  <u>Project 2</u> 1) Cognitive behavioral therapy 2) Mindfulness based stress reduction  <u>Project 3</u> 1) Acupuncture 2) Sham	Age 21-65 English fluency Chronic low back pain  <u>Exclusion</u> MRI contraindications Pregnant/planning pregnancy Neurologic disorder, history of seizures, stroke, or brain abnormalities Mental health conditions that would interfere with study procedures	<u>Primary</u> Changes in Pain severity VAS (up to 12 months post treatment)  <u>Secondary</u> Changes in pain symptom severity and well-being using PROMIS	March 2020
<b>The Effect of Cognitive Functional Therapy on Patients with Non-Specific Chronic Low Back Pain</b>  <b>University of Limerick, Curtin University, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Mayo General Hospital (Ireland), Health Service Executive (Ireland)</b>  <a href="#">NCT02145728</a>	RCT Parallel Assignment Single Blind N=208	1) Individual Cognitive Functional Therapy  2) Group Exercise Classes	Age 18-75 Chronic low back pain >6 months >14% for disability on Oswestry Disability Index Independently mobile, able to participate in a rehabilitation program  <u>Exclusion</u> Primary pain area not lumbar spine Leg pain as primary problem <6 months post lumbar spine or lower limb or abdominal surgery Pain relieving procedures in last 3 months Pregnancy Rheumatologic/ inflammatory disease, progressive neurological disease, unstable	<u>Primary</u> Change in Oswestry Disability Index (8-14 weeks; 1, 12, and 36 months)  <u>Secondary</u> Pain intensity (NRS) Back Pain Beliefs Physical activity Coping Strategies Pain Self-Efficacy Subjective Health Complaints Inventory Nordic Musculoskeletal Screening Stress (DASS 21)	December 2017

			cardiac conditions, malignancy/cancer, acute trauma, infection, spinal cord compression/cauda equina	Patient satisfaction Orebro Musculoskeletal Screening Medication Economic evaluation	
<b>Pain Management for Patients with Low Back Pain and Psychosocial Risk Factors in a Hospital Setting</b>  <b>Central Jutland Regional Hospital</b>  <a href="#">NCT03141541</a>	RCT Parallel Assignment Single Blind N=130	1) Usual Care  2) Group-based Pain Management (based on cognitive behavioral therapy, relaxation, and breathing exercises)	Non-specific low back pain lasting $\geq 3$ months Psychosocial risk profile defined as a fear avoidance score $>24$ (Orebro Musculoskeletal Pain Questionnaire) and or bodily distress score $>15$ (Common Mental Disorder Questionnaire) and/or health anxiety score $>9$ (Common Mental Disorder Questionnaire) Speaks/understands Danish Age $\geq 18$  <u>Exclusion</u> Inflammatory or malignant disease Spine surgery in past year Untreated or severe depression Psychiatric treatment in past year Abuse of drugs/alcohol Pregnancy	<u>Primary</u> Roland Morris Disability Questionnaire (12 months)  <u>Secondary</u> Low Back Pain Rating Scale-Back pain, leg pain Eq-5D Pain Catastrophizing Scale Sick leave	September 2019

Source: [www.ClinicalTrials.gov](http://www.ClinicalTrials.gov) (NOTE: studies listed on site include both clinical trials and observational studies)

## Appendix D. Comparative Clinical Effectiveness

### Supplemental Information

For the systematic literature review, each publication was abstracted by a single reviewer, and the abstracted data was then validated for quality assurance by a different reviewer. Five total reviewers participated in data abstraction. We used criteria published by the US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) to assess the quality of RCTs, using the categories “good,” “fair,” or “poor” (see Appendix Tables D5 and D9).<sup>63</sup> Quality assessment of systematic reviews follows the Assessing the Methodological Quality of Systematic Reviews (AMSTAR) guidelines.<sup>64</sup> Guidance for quality ratings using these criteria is presented below.

**Good:** *Meets all criteria: Comparable groups are assembled initially and maintained throughout the study; reliable and valid measurement instruments are used and applied equally to the groups; interventions are spelled out clearly; all important outcomes are considered; and appropriate attention is paid to confounders in analysis. In addition, intention to treat analysis is used for RCTs.*

**Fair:** *Studies were graded "fair" if any or all of the following problems occur, without the fatal flaws noted in the "poor" category below: Generally comparable groups are assembled initially but some question remains whether some (although not major) differences occurred with follow-up; measurement instruments are acceptable (although not the best) and generally applied equally; some but not all important outcomes are considered; and some but not all potential confounders are addressed. Intention to treat analysis is done for RCTs.*

**Poor:** *Studies were graded "poor" if any of the following fatal flaws exists: Groups assembled initially are not close to being comparable or maintained throughout the study; unreliable or invalid measurement instruments are used or not applied equally among groups (including not masking outcome assessment); and key confounders are given little or no attention. For RCTs, intention to treat analysis is lacking.*

## Inclusions from Previous Systematic Reviews

**Table D1. Inclusions from the AHRQ Review<sup>9</sup>**

<b>Cognitive Behavioral Therapy</b>
Lamb, S. E., et al. (2010). "Group cognitive behavioural treatment for low-back pain in primary care: a randomised controlled trial and cost-effectiveness analysis." <i>Lancet</i> 375(9718): 916-923.
Lamb, S. E., et al. (2012). "Group cognitive behavioural interventions for low back pain in primary care: extended follow-up of the Back Skills Training Trial (ISRCTN54717854)." <i>Pain</i> 153(2): 494-501.
Nicholas, M. K., et al. (1992). "Comparison of cognitive-behavioral group treatment and an alternative non-psychological treatment for chronic low back pain." <i>Pain</i> 48(3): 339-347.
Schweikert, B., et al. (2006). "Effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of adding a cognitive behavioral treatment to the rehabilitation of chronic low back pain." <i>J Rheumatol</i> 33(12): 2519-2526.
Smeets, R. J., et al. (2008). "Chronic low back pain: physical training, graded activity with problem solving training, or both? The one-year post-treatment results of a randomized controlled trial." <i>Pain</i> 134(3): 263-276.
Turner, J. A. (1982). "Comparison of group progressive-relaxation training and cognitive-behavioral group therapy for chronic low back pain." <i>J Consult Clin Psychol</i> 50(5): 757-765.
<b>Tai Chi</b>
Hall, A. M., et al. (2011). "Tai chi exercise for treatment of pain and disability in people with persistent low back pain: a randomized controlled trial." <i>Arthritis Care Res (Hoboken)</i> 63(11): 1576-1583.
Weifen, W., et al. (2013). "Effectiveness of Tai Chi Practice for Non-Specific Chronic Low Back Pain on Retired Athletes: A Randomized Controlled Study." <i>Journal of Musculoskeletal Pain</i> 21(1).
<b>Yoga</b>
Cox, H., et al. (2010). "A randomised controlled trial of yoga for the treatment of chronic low back pain: results of a pilot study." <i>Complement Ther Clin Pract</i> 16(4): 187-193.
Cramer, H., et al. (2013). "A systematic review and meta-analysis of yoga for low back pain." <i>Clinical Journal of Pain</i> 29(5): 450-460.
<b>Acupuncture</b>
Brinkhaus, B., et al. (2006). "Acupuncture in patients with chronic low back pain: a randomized controlled trial." <i>Archives of Internal Medicine</i> 166(4): 450-457.
Cherkin, D. C., et al. (2001). "Randomized trial comparing traditional Chinese medical acupuncture, therapeutic massage, and self-care education for chronic low back pain." <i>Archives of Internal Medicine</i> 161(8): 1081-1088.
Cherkin, D. C., et al. (2009). "A randomized trial comparing acupuncture, simulated acupuncture, and usual care for chronic low back pain." <i>Archives of Internal Medicine</i> 169(9): 858-866.
Haake, M., et al. (2007). "German Acupuncture Trials (GERAC) for chronic low back pain: randomized, multicenter, blinded, parallel-group trial with 3 groups." <i>Archives of Internal Medicine</i> 167(17): 1892-1898.
Gunn, C. C., et al. (1980). "Dry needling of muscle motor points for chronic low-back pain: a randomized clinical trial with long-term follow-up." <i>Spine (Phila Pa 1976)</i> 5(3): 279-291.
Kerr, D. P., et al. (2003). "Acupuncture in the management of chronic low back pain: a blinded randomized controlled trial." <i>Clinical Journal of Pain</i> 19(6): 364-370.
Cho, Y. J., et al. (2013). "Acupuncture for chronic low back pain: a multicenter, randomized, patient-assessor blind, sham-controlled clinical trial." <i>Spine (Phila Pa 1976)</i> 38(7): 549-557.
Molsberger, A. F., et al. (2002). "Does acupuncture improve the orthopedic management of chronic low back pain--a randomized, blinded, controlled trial with 3 months follow up." <i>Pain</i> 99(3): 579-587.

### Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Cherkin, D. C., et al. (2016). "Effect of mindfulness-based stress reduction versus cognitive behavioral therapy or usual care on back pain and functional limitations in adults with chronic low back pain: A randomized clinical trial." *JAMA - Journal of the American Medical Association* 315(12): 1240.

Morone, N. E., et al. (2009). "A mind-body program for older adults with chronic low back pain: results of a pilot study." *Pain Med* 10(8): 1395-1407.

Morone, et al. (2016). "A Mind-Body Program for Older Adults With Chronic Low Back Pain: A Randomized Clinical Trial." *JAMA Intern Med* 176(3): 329-337.

**Table D2. Included Studies from Neck Pain Systematic Reviews<sup>66-69</sup>**

### Acupuncture

Liang Z, Zhu X, Yang X, Fu W, Lu A (2011) Assessment of a traditional acupuncture therapy for chronic neck pain: a pilot randomised controlled study. *Complement Ther Med* 19 Suppl 1: S26–32. doi: 10.1016/j.ctim.2010.11.005 PMID: 21195292

Sahin N, Ozcan E, Sezen K, Karatas O, Issever H (2010) Efficacy of acupuncture in patients with chronic neck pain—a randomised, sham controlled trial. *Acupunct Electrother Res* 35: 17–27. PMID: 20578644

Fu WB, Liang ZH, Zhu XP, Yu P, Zhang JF (2009) Analysis on the effect of acupuncture in treating cervical spondylosis with different syndrome types. *Chin J Integr Med* 15: 426–430. doi: 10.1007/s11655-009-0426-z PMID: 20082247

Birch S, Jamison RN (1998) Controlled trial of Japanese acupuncture for chronic myofascial neck pain: assessment of specific and nonspecific effects of treatment. *Clin J Pain* 14: 248–255. PMID: 9758075

Birch S, Jamison R. Controlled trial of Japanese acupuncture for chronic myofascial neck pain: assessment of specific and nonspecific effects of treatment. *Clin J Pain* 1998;14:248–55

Coan RM, Wong G, Coan PL. The acupuncture treatment of neck pain: a randomized controlled study. *Am J Chin Med* 1982;9:326–32.

### Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Gustavsson C, von Koch L. Applied relaxation in the treatment of long-lasting neck pain: a randomized controlled pilot study. *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine* 2006;38(2):100–7.

Wicksell RK, Ahlqvist J, Bring A, Melin L, Olsson GL. Can exposure and acceptance strategies improve functioning and life satisfaction in people with chronic pain and whiplash associated disorders (WAD)? A randomized controlled trial. *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy* 2008;37(3):169–82.

Monticone M, Baiardi P, Vanti C, Ferrari S, Nava T, Montironi C, et al. Chronic neck pain and treatment of cognitive and behavioural factors: results of a randomised controlled clinical trial. *European Spine Journal* 2012;21(8): 1558–66.

Pato U, Di Stefano G, Fravi N, Arnold M, Curatolo M, Radanov BP, et al. Comparison of randomized treatments for late whiplash. *Neurology* 2010;74(15):1223–30.

Soderlund A, Lindberg P. Cognitive behavioural components in physiotherapy management of chronic whiplash associated disorders (WAD) - A randomised group study. *Physiotherapy Theory and Practice* 2001;17(4): 229–38.

Soderlund A, Lindberg P. Cognitive behavioural components in physiotherapy management of chronic whiplash associated disorders (WAD)—a randomised group study. *Giornale Italiano di Medicina del Lavoro ed Ergonomia* 2007;29(1 Suppl A):A5–11.

Vonk F, Verhagen AP, Geilen M, Vos CJ, Koes BW. Effectiveness of behavioural graded activity compared with physiotherapy treatment in chronic neck pain: design of a randomised clinical trial [ISRCTN88733332]. *BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders* 2004;5(1):34.

Vonk F, Verhagen AP, Twisk JW, Köke AJ, Luiten MW, Koes BW. Effectiveness of a behaviour graded activity program versus conventional exercise for chronic neck pain patients. *European Journal of Pain* 2009;13(5):533–41.

## Evidence Tables: Chronic Low Back Pain

**Table D3. Summary Characteristics: Studies Identified Through Updated Low Back Pain Literature Search**

Reference	Study Type	Intervention	Comparator	N	Follow-Up (Months)	Inclusion	Exclusion
<b>Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction</b>							
<b>Cherkin DC JAMA 2016<sup>12</sup>; Turner JA PAIN. 2016<sup>103</sup></b>	RCT	1) MBSR (n=116)	2) CBT (n=112) 3) Usual Care (n=113)	342	26 weeks – primary endpoint  52 weeks overall	Age 20-70 yrs. Back pain ≥3 mos. *Pt-rated bothersome-ness of pain ≥4 *Pt-rated pain interference with activities ≥3  *(0=not at all bothersome - 10=extremely bothersome).	Pregnancy Spine surgery in previous 2 years Disability compensation or litigation Fibromyalgia/cancer diagnosis/other major medical conditions Plans to see a medical specialist for back pain
<b>Cherkin DC JAMA 2017<sup>71</sup></b>	RCT – follow up	See Cherkin DC JAMA 2016	See Cherkin 2016	N=276 (81% original)	24	See Cherkin DC JAMA 2016	See Cherkin DC JAMA 2016
<b>Zgierska Pain Med 2016<sup>75</sup></b>	RCT Phase I/II  United States	1) Meditation-CBT plus usual care  Manualized training in meditation 2 hours/week for 8 weeks. Each session focused on a specific topic building on previous topics, including: defining mindfulness meditation (MM); auto-pilot triggers; using MM in daily life; MM	2) usual care (eligible to receive intervention after study completion)	1) 21 2) 14	26 weeks (6.5 months)	Age ≥21 years; fluent in English; daily CLBP (lumbosacral area pain or sciatica leg pain) treated by a clinician with daily opioid therapy (at least 30mg/day of morphine equivalent dose) ≥3 months; ability to feel thermal sensations in both hands.	Prior experience with MM training or practice; inability to consent or reliably participate; diagnosis of borderline personality, bipolar, delusional disorders; current pregnancy.



Reference	Study Type	Intervention	Comparator	N	Follow-Up (Months)	Inclusion	Exclusion
		as coping mechanism; pain catastrophizing; self-care; MM to support life balance. Skills included breath meditations; body scan meditations; mindful movement. Participants encouraged to practice formal MM at least 6 days/week for 30 mins/day. Led by 2 psychologists.					
<b>Morone, NE. JAMA Intern Med. 2016</b>	RCT  Pittsburgh metropolitan area, United States	1) Mind-body program (i.e. Mindfulness Stress Reduction)  Experimental group received 8-week MBSR program. Four methods of mindfulness meditation taught to participants. In addition, monthly 60-minute booster sessions were held.	2) Health Education (control)  Health education program based on “10 Keys to Healthy Aging.” Pain information was not included as a part of this education, although participants were taught on healthy lifestyle, hypertension management, etc. Monthly for one hour, control group also received booster sessions.	282	6	>65 years old Intact cognition A score of $\geq 11$ on the Roland and Morris Disability Questionnaire[RMDQ] indicating a functional limitation Reported moderate chronic pain daily for > 3 months	Participation in other mindfulness programs Serious underlying medical conditions Non-ambulatory Severe mobility limitation Vision or hearing limitation that would interfere with assessments Pain in other areas of body greater intensity than low back pain Acute or terminal illness moderate to severe depressive symptoms (Geriatric Depression Scale score, $\geq 21$ )

Reference	Study Type	Intervention	Comparator	N	Follow-Up (Months)	Inclusion	Exclusion
<b>Yoga</b>							
<b>Bramberg EB BMC Musculo Disord 2017<sup>70</sup></b>	RCT	1) Kundalini yoga  60 min/twice weekly for 6 weeks; physical activity component (typically slower pose movements than traditional forms of yoga) in addition to meditation and awareness training	2) Self-care advice 3) Strength Training Exercise  For self-care, participants received “The Back Book” booklet with educational advice.  For strength training, 5 supervised sessions over 6 weeks with physiotherapist. Participants instructed to perform regimen additional twice/week. Program included strengthening, endurance, and stabilization.	159	12	Non- specific low back pain, with or without neck pain; non-disabling (from perspective of work disability); 18-60 years old; ≥90 points on the OMPSQ; sufficient understanding of the Swedish language	Presence of spinal pathology (tumors or spinal fractures); Pregnancy; comorbidities affecting the ability to perform the interventions; continuous ongoing sick-listing ≥8 weeks; ongoing regular weekly yoga practice or strength training
<b>Groessl EJ Am J Prev Med 2017<sup>80</sup></b>	RCT	1) Yoga  2 classes/week for 12 weeks; 60 minutes each. Yoga was hatha style, with physical postures, movement sequences, and breathing, directed	2) Wait list  Patients in this group received usual care for six months, after which they had the opportunity to attend yoga classes.	150	6	Age ≥18 years; VA patient; diagnosis of chronic low back pain ≥ 6 months; willing to attend a yoga program or be assigned to delayed treatment with yoga; willing to complete 4 assessments;	Back surgery within the last 12 months; back pain due to specific systemic problem (e.g., lupus, scleroderma, fibromyalgia); morbid obesity (BMI > 40); significant sciatica or nerve compression < 3 months or

Reference	Study Type	Intervention	Comparator	N	Follow-Up (Months)	Inclusion	Exclusion
		attention, meditation. Participants received manual that recommended 15-20 min home practice on days without class	Both groups received usual care for the duration of the trial; participants asked to refrain from changing regular treatment during this time unless deemed medically necessary. Usual care includes prescription and nonprescription pain meds, physical therapy, spinal manipulation, exercise, self-help techniques.			English Literacy; has not begun new pain treatments or medications in the past month; willing to not change pain treatments (e.g., discontinue a treatment; increase medication dose) during the 12-week intervention period unless medically necessary	chronic lumbar radicular pain > 3 months; unstable, serious coexisting medical or psychiatric conditions; insufficient data to rule out acute, metastatic disease, (unless primary care physician approves); attended or practiced yoga > 1x in the last 12 months; positive Romberg test (with or without sensory neuropathy)
<b>Saper RB</b> <i>Ann of Intern Med.</i> 2017 <sup>73</sup>	12-week Single-blind 3-group Randomized noninferiority trial	Yoga (n=127)	Physical Therapy (n=129) Education (n=64)	320	12	Age 18-64 yrs *Nonspecific LBP lasting at least 12 weeks with average pain intensity $\geq 4$  *(0=no pain- 10=worst pain possible)	Persons with specific causes of cLBP were excluded.
<b>Teut, M</b> <i>Journal of Pain</i> 2016 <sup>74</sup>	RCT	Yoga (n=61)  Viniyoga method, 24 classes, 45 mins each, over 3 months. Exercises were adapted to meet	Qigong (n=58) Control (n=57)  Qigong group received 12 classes over 3 months; 90 mins each.	176	6	Age $\geq 65$ years; chronic low back pain $\geq 6$ months; intensity of back pain according to the pain item of the Functional Rating Index	Acute disc prolapse or protrusion with acute neurological symptoms within last 3 months; severe organic or psychiatric disease; cancer/cancer-related pain in

Reference	Study Type	Intervention	Comparator	N	Follow-Up (Months)	Inclusion	Exclusion
		<p>individual patient needs; included physical, breathing, concentration exercises in sitting, standing, laying positions.</p> <p>Patients in all 3 arms were allowed to continue usual care, although no physiotherapy and no opioids allowed within trial duration.</p>	<p>Standardized “Dantian” program and Nei Yang Gong exercises from the Training System Liu Ya Fei used. Also included was instruction on self-massage.</p> <p>Control group participants received no additional intervention for 6 months, although offered free participation in qigong or yoga after trial completion.</p>			<p>≥2 over past week; written informed consent provided.</p>	<p>bones; use of pain meds that works over the central nervous system pain agents (e.g. opioids); drug and/or alcohol use disorder; participation in another clinical trial within past 6 months; participation in yoga or qigong training within past year; physiotherapy planned to start within duration</p>

**Table D4. Baseline Characteristics: Studies Identified Through Updated Low Back Pain Literature Search**

Reference	Group	Mean Age, yrs	%F	% W	Pain, VAS 0-10	Function	Opioid Use	Duration of Pain	Other
<b>Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction</b>									
<b>Turner JA PAIN 2016; Cherkin DC JAMA 2016<sup>12</sup></b>	(1) MBSR (2) CBT (3) Usual Care	Yr (SD) 50(11.9) 49.1(12.6) 48.9(12.5)	N (%) 71(61.2) 66(58.9) 87(77)	N (%) (1)97(84.4) (2) 93(83.0) (3) 88(80.0)	Pain bother-ness Mean (SD)  6.1(1.6) 6.0(1.5) 6.0(1.6)	Roland Disability Questionnaire  Mean(SD) 11.8(4.7) 11.5(5.0) 10.9(4.8)	Opioids in last week  14(12.1) 12(10.7) 12(10.6)	Pain in last 180 days  Median (IQR) 170 (115-180) 160 (100-180) 160 (100-180)	
<b>Cherkin DC JAMA 2017<sup>71</sup></b>	(1) MBSR (2) CBT (3) Usual Care	See Cherkin 2016	See Cherkin 2016	See Cherkin 2016	See Cherkin 2016	See Cherkin 2016	See Cherkin 2016	See Cherkin 2016	
<b>Zgierska Pain Med 2016<sup>75</sup>; Zgierska, Journal of Alternative and Complimentary Medicine 2016<sup>104</sup>; Zgierska J Opioid Manag 2014<sup>105</sup></b>	1) Meditation- CBT plus usual care 2) Usual care	Mean (SD) 52.7(10.5) 50.5(8.6)	N (%) 15(71.4) 13(92.9)	N (%) 16(76.2) 12(85.7)	Averaged Pain Severity Score Mean (SD) 6.3(1.2) 4.9(1.1)	ODI Mean total score (SD)  68.1(9.3) 64.5(14.1)	Morphine-eq dose (mg/d) past 28 days  Mean (SD) 166.9(153.7) 120.3(76.9)  Mean opioid therapy duration: 7.9 years	14.2 years (10.1)	Brief Pain Inventory;  Biomarkers;  Chronic pain acceptance  Pain psychocal tests

Reference	Group	Mean Age, yrs	%F	% W	Pain, VAS 0-10	Function	Opioid Use	Duration of Pain	Other
							Opioid dose, MED, mg/day: 148.3  Illicit/unprescribed drug use: 28.6%		
<b>Morone, NE. JAMA Intern Med. 2016</b>	1) Mind-body (n=140) 2) Education (control) (n=142)	1) 75 (7.2) 2) 74 (6.0)	1) 66.4 2) 66.2	1) 70.0 2) 71.1	Numeric Pain Rating Scale Average 1) 11.0 (4.0) 2) 10.5 (4.2) Current 1) 7.4 (4.9) 2) 7.1 (4.6) Most severe 1) 14.9 (4.2) 2) 14.0 (4.5)	Roland and Morris Disability Questionnaire 1) 15.6 (3.0) 2) 15.4 (3.0)	NR	Pain duration (months), mean (SD) 1) 137 (156.5) 2) 138 (160.3)	
<b>Yoga</b>									
<b>Bramberg EB BMC Musculo Disord 2017 <sup>70</sup></b>	1) Kundalini yoga (n=52) 2) Self-care advice (n=55) 3) Strength Training Exercise (n=52)	1) 46.9 (9.6) 2) 43.9 (11.7) 3) 46.3 (9.3)	1) 71.7 2) 80 3) 61.5	NR	CPGS range from 0-100  Back Pain Intensity, mean (SD) 1) 57.1 (18.5) 2) 55.6 (18.7) 3) 57.7 (15.4)	NR	NR	NR	% w/ chronic Low Back Pain 1) 94 2) 93 3) 96  Back Disability, mean (SD) 1) 37.2 (23.4) 2) 38.6 (21.4) 3) 37.6 (20.9)

Reference	Group	Mean Age, yrs	%F	% W	Pain, VAS 0-10	Function	Opioid Use	Duration of Pain	Other
	<i>*All groups include both chronic LBP &amp; LNP unstratified.</i>				Neck Pain Intensity, mean (SD) 1) 44.4 (24.5) 2) 37.6 (26.1) 3) 46.5 (24.4)				Neck Disability, mean (SD) 1) 25.0 (23.3) 2) 23.7 (22.7) 3) 28.5 (24.1)
<b>Groessl EJ Am J Prev Med 2017<sup>80</sup></b>	1) Yoga (n=75) 2) Delayed Yoga (usual care) (n=75)	Mean (SD) 1) 53.3 (12.7) 2) 53.6 (13.9)	1) 27 2) 25	1) 47 2) 52	Brief Pain Inventory (BPI) 0-10 scale, score (SD) 1) 4.64 (1.76) 2) 4.68 (2.16)	RMDQ 0-24 scale, score (SD) 1) 9.40 (5.15) 2) 10.3 (5.87)	Currently using narcotic medication, n (%) 1) 14 (19) 2) 16 (21)	Mean years since first sought medical care for LBP (SD): 1) 15.4 (10.4) 2) 14.6 (13.5)	
<b>Saper RB Ann of Intern Med. 2017<sup>73</sup></b>	(1) Yoga (n=127) (2) Physical Therapy (n=129) (3) Education (n=64)	Mean(SD) (1) 46.4(10.4) (2) 46.4(11.0) (3) 44.2(10.8)	N (%) (1) 72(56.7) (2) 90(69.8) (3) 42(65.6)	N (%) (1) 26(20.5) (2) 20(15.5) (3) 11(17.2)	*Mean(SD)back pain intensity score (1) 7.1(1.5) (2) 7.2(1.5) (3) 7.0(1.4)  *(0=no pain-10=worst pain possible)	*Baseline RMDQ mean(SD) score (1) 13.9(5.6) (2) 15.6(5.1) (3) 15.0(5.0)  *Higher scores=worse function	N (%) (1) 28(22) (2) 23(17.8) (3) 12(18.8)	NR	*QoL Mean SF-36 physical health score (1) 36.2 (2) 35.2 (3) 36.6  Mean SF-36 mental health score (1) 43.4 (2) 41.4 (3) 42.3

Reference	Group	Mean Age, yrs	%F	% W	Pain, VAS 0-10	Function	Opioid Use	Duration of Pain	Other
									<p>*Score range 0-100, higher scores=better HRQoI</p> <p>Comorbidity Depression, %</p> <p>(1) 16.5</p> <p>(2) 25.6</p> <p>(3) 18.8</p>
<b>Teut, M <i>Journal of Pain</i> 2016<sup>74</sup></b>	1) Yoga (n=61) 2) Qigong (n=58) 3) Control (n=57)	Mean (SD) 1) 73.0 (5.6) 2) 72.4 (5.7) 3) 72.6 (6.0)	1) 88.5 2) 86.2 3) 91.2	NR	<p>Average Pain Intensity past week (VAS 0-100), mean (SD)</p> <p>1) 51.5 (18.7)</p> <p>2) 50.6 (19.5)</p> <p>3) 50.6 (21.3)</p> <p>Functional Rating Index, mean (SD)</p> <p>1) 2.6 (0.7)</p> <p>2) 2.4 (0.6)</p> <p>3) 2.5 (0.6)</p>	<p>FFbHR back function questionnaire (mean [SD], range of 0-100%)</p> <p>1) 68.7 (15.4)</p> <p>2) 70.4 (18.7)</p> <p>3) 69.2 (19.1)</p>	<p>Medication intake because of low back pain, n (%)</p> <p>1) 37 (60.7)</p> <p>2) 37 (63.8)</p> <p>3) 36 (63.2)</p>	<p>Duration of low back pain, mean years (SD)</p> <p>1) 18.7 (12.2)</p> <p>2) 18.1 (13.2)</p> <p>3) 19.6 (16.3)</p>	<p>SF-36 Physical Health (SD):</p> <p>1) 36.3 (8.7)</p> <p>2) 37.5 (7.8)</p> <p>3) 36.5 (9.3)</p> <p>Mental Health:</p> <p>1) 49.0 (11.8)</p> <p>2) 50.6 (11.1)</p> <p>3) 49.9 (10.3)</p> <p>Geriatric depression Scale (SD):</p> <p>1) 2.9 (2.6)</p> <p>2) 2.1 (2.5)</p> <p>3) 2.8 (2.8)</p>



**Table D5. Quality Assessment: Studies Identified Through Updated Low Back Pain Literature Search**

Reference	Comparable Groups	Maintain Comparability	Double Blind	Measurements Equal and Valid	Clear Definition of Intervention	Key Outcomes Assessed	Analysis Appropriate	Quality
<b>Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction</b>								
Turner JA <i>PAIN</i> . 2016; Cherkin DC <i>JAMA</i> . 2016 <sup>12</sup>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Fair
Cherkin DC <i>JAMA</i> 2017 <sup>71</sup>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Fair
Morone, NE <i>JAMA Intern Med</i> 2016 <sup>72</sup>	Yes	Yes	No – outcome assessments conducted by staff members blinded to intervention	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Good
Zgierska <i>Pain Med</i> 2016 <sup>75</sup>	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes, but not in a useful format	Yes	Poor
<b>Yoga</b>								
Bramberg <i>EB BMC Musculo Disord</i> 2017 <sup>70</sup>	Yes	No	No, single-blind	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Fair
Groessl <i>EJ Am J Prev Med</i> 2017 <sup>80</sup>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Good
Saper RB <i>Ann of Intern Med.</i> 2017 <sup>73</sup>	No	No	No, single-blind	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Poor
Teut M <i>J of Pain.</i> 2016 <sup>74</sup>	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Good

**Table D6. Key Outcomes: Studies Identified Through Updated Low Back Pain Literature Search**

Reference	Group	Pain, VAS	Function	Quality of Life	Return to Work	Depression	Other
<b>Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction</b>							
<b>Cherkin DC JAMA. 2016<sup>12</sup></b>	(1) MBSR (2) CBT (3) Usual Care	% of patients with Clinically Meaningful Improvement	% of patients with Clinically Meaningful Improvement	* Mean change estimates SF-12 Physical score	NR	*Mean change estimates PHQ-8	NR
		Pain Bothersomeness Results:	RMDQ results:	Week 8		Week 8	
		(1) (2) (3)	(1) (2) (3)	(1) 3.69		(1) -1.60	
		Wk 43.6 44.9 26.6	Wk 60.5 57.7 44.1	(2) 3.24		(2) -2.29	
		26	26	(3) 2.21		(3) -0.12	
		Wk 48.5 39.6 31	Wk 68.6 58.8 48.6	Week 26		Week 26	
		52	52	(1) 3.58		(1) -1.32	
		Mean Change from Baseline	Mean Change from Baseline	(2) 3.78		(2) -1.80	
		Pain Bothersomeness Results:	RMDQ results:	(3) 3.27		(3) -0.64	
		(1) (2) (3)	(1) (2) (3)	Week 52		Week 52	
		Wk -1.48 -1.56 -	Wk -4.33 -4.38 -2.96	(1) 3.87		(1) -1.51	
		26 0.84	26	(2) 3.79		(2) -1.72	
		Wk -1.95 -1.76 -	Wk -5.3 -4.78 -3.43	(3) 2.93		(3) -0.88	
		52 1.10	52	SF-12 Mental score			
				Week 8			
				(1) 1.68			
				(2) 1.77			
				(3) -0.65			
				Week 26			

Reference	Group	Pain, VAS	Function	Quality of Life	Return to Work	Depression	Other
				(1) 0.45 (2) 2.13 (3) -1.11  Week 52 (1) 2.01 (2) 1.81 (3) 0.75			
<b>Cherkin DC JAMA 2017<sup>71</sup></b>	(1) MBSR (2) CBT (3) Usual Care	Patients with clinically meaningful improvement in Pain bothersomeness ( $\geq 30\%$ ), %(95%CI)  41.2(33.2 to 51.0) 39.6 (31.4 to 49.8) 31.1 (23.9 to 40.5)  Relative risk (95%CI) 0.96 (0.71 to 1.30) CBT to MBSR 1.27 (0.90 to 1.79) CBT to usual care 1.32 (0.95 to 1.85) MBSR to usual care  Change from baseline Pain Bothersomeness, 104 weeks, 95% CI: 1) -1.57 (-1.97 to -1.17) 2) -1.79 (-2.21 to -1.37) 3) -1.25 (-1.69 to -0.81)	Patients with clinically meaningful improvement in RDI ( $\geq 30\%$ ), %(95%CI)  55.4(46.9 to 65.5) 62.0(53.5 to 71.7) 42.0(33.8 to 52.2)  Relative risk (95%CI) 1.12 (0.90 to 1.39) CBT to MBSR 1.48 (1.13 to 1.92) CBT to usual care 1.32 (1.00 to 1.74) MBSR to usual care  Change from baseline RDQ, 104 weeks, 95% CI: 1) -4.09 (-5.08 to -3.10) 2) -4.59 (-5.60 to -3.57) 3) -2.74 (-3.81 to -1.68)	NR	NR	NR	

Reference	Group	Pain, VAS	Function	Quality of Life	Return to Work	Depression	Other
<b>Morone, NE JAMA Intern Med 2016<sup>72</sup></b>	1) Mind-body (n=140) 2) Education (n=142)	<p>6-month outcomes:</p> <p>Average Numeric Pain Rating [NRS] Score (SD) [on 0-20 range] / change from baseline</p> <p>1) 9.5 (5.1) / -1.5 2) 10.6 (4.7) / +0.1</p> <p>Current NRS/change from baseline</p> <p>1) 6.8 (5.2) / -0.6 2) 8.6 (5.6) / +1.5</p> <p>Most severe NRS/change from baseline</p> <p>1) 12.3 (5.5) / -2.6 2) 13.4 (4.9) / -0.6</p> <p>% achieving meaningful improvement NRS, Average/Current/Most Severe</p> <p>1) 36.7/44.4/35.9 2) 26.7/25.2/22.2 P=0.09/0.001/0.02</p>	<p>6-month outcomes:</p> <p>Mean RMDQ score (SD) / change from baseline</p> <p>1) 12.2 (5.1) / -3.4 2) 12.6 (5.0) / -2.8</p> <p>% achieving meaningful improvement</p> <p>1) 49.2 2) 48.9 P=0.97</p>	<p>At 6 months:</p> <p>SF-36 mean score (SD) / change from baseline</p> <p>Global Health Composite:</p> <p>1) 42.4 (9.2) / +1.9 2) 42.1 (9.8) / +1.5</p> <p>Physical Health Composite:</p> <p>1) 41.2 (8.2) / +2.4 2) 41.2 (8.5) / +2.3</p>			
<b>Zgierska Pain Med 2016<sup>75</sup></b>	1) Meditation-CBT 2) Usual care	<p>Brief pain inventory (difference in average pain); mean (95%CI)</p> <p>Baseline-8wks: control v experimental 0.9 (0.01 to 1.7) Cohen's d=0.69</p>	<p>ODI, % achieved score change from baseline to 26 weeks (estimated from graph)</p> <p>+ worsens disability; - improves disability (decreased)</p> <p>+ 0-4 points:</p> <p>1) 34% 2) 25%</p>	NR	NR	NR	<p>26 weeks:</p> <p>Brief Pain Inventory Pain Intensity, % change from baseline</p> <p>1) -8% 2) + 10%</p>

Reference	Group	Pain, VAS	Function	Quality of Life	Return to Work	Depression	Other
		<p>Baseline-26 weeks: control vs experimental 1.03(0.2 to 1.9); Cohen's d=0.86</p> <p>P for repeat measures=0.045</p>	<p>+ 4-8 points:</p> <p>1) 20%</p> <p>2) 11%</p> <p>+ &gt;8 points:</p> <p>1) 0%</p> <p>2) 23%</p> <p>0 points:</p> <p>1) 0%</p> <p>2) 5%</p> <p>- 0-4 points:</p> <p>1) 0%</p> <p>2) 16%</p> <p>- 4-8 points:</p> <p>1) 18%</p> <p>2) 24%</p> <p>- 8-12 points:</p> <p>1) 7%</p> <p>2) 0%</p> <p>- &gt;12 points:</p> <p>1) 19%</p> <p>2) 0%</p> <p>ODI total score difference, mean (95% CI)</p> <p>Baseline-8 weeks control vs experimental 1.9(-5.5 to 9.3); Cohen's d=0.15</p>				

Reference	Group	Pain, VAS	Function	Quality of Life	Return to Work	Depression	Other
			Baseline-26 weeks control vs experimental 6.5 (-1.0 to 14.0); Cohen's d=0.68				
<b>Yoga</b>							
<b>Bramberg EB BMC Musculo Disord 2017</b> <sup>70</sup>	1) Kundalini yoga 2) Self-care advice 3) Strength Training Exercise	CPGS range from 0-100  6 Months Back Pain Intensity, mean (SD) / change from baseline 1) 47.0 (24.3) / -10.1 2) 50.2 (23.9) / -5.4 3) 41.7 (20.6) / -16.0 Neck Pain Intensity, mean (SD) / change from baseline 1) 35.0 (21.1) / -9.4 2) 34.3 (27.2) / -3.3 3) 29.8 (20.7) / -16.7	NR	NR	NR	NR	Back Disability, mean (SD) / change from baseline 1) 29.4 (24.2) / -7.8 2) 32.8 (27.8) / -5.8 3) 24.8 (24.2) / -12.8  Neck Disability, mean (SD) / change from baseline 1) 16.3 (20.1) / -8.7 2) 21.5 (26.4) / -2.2 3) 13.3 (18.3) / -15.2
<b>Groessl EJ Am J Prev Med 2017</b> <sup>80</sup>	1) Yoga (n=75)	*BPI change from baseline at 6 months (95% CI) 1) -0.44 (-0.78, -0.11)	*RMDQ change from baseline at 6 months (95% CI) 1) -3.37 (-4.51, -2.23)	NR	NR	NR	% of patients using narcotic pain medications

Reference	Group	Pain, VAS	Function	Quality of Life	Return to Work	Depression	Other
	2) Delayed Yoga (usual care) (n=75)	<p>2) 0.15 (-0.18, 0.47)</p> <p>*Between-group difference (95% CI) -0.59 (-1.05, -0.13), p = 0.013</p> <p><i>*results of linear mixed-effects model</i></p> <p>% achieved clinically meaningful difference at 6 months (BPI score change <math>\geq 1.0</math> points) 1) 39 2) 18 P=0.020</p>	<p>2) -0.89 (-2.02, 0.23)</p> <p>*Between-group difference (95% CI) -2.48 (-4.08, -0.87), p = 0.003</p> <p><i>*results of linear mixed-effects model</i></p> <p>% achieved clinically meaningful difference at 6 months (RDMQ <math>\geq 30\%</math> decrease) 1) 57 2) 24 P&lt;0.001</p>				<p>at 6 months / change from baseline</p> <p>1) 9 / -10 2) 7 / -14 P=0.395</p>
<b>Saper RB Ann of Intern Med. 2017 <sup>73</sup></b>	(1) Yoga (2) Physical Therapy (3) Education	<p>*Mean back pain intensity score at 12 weeks (measured right at end of intervention) (1) 5.3(2.1) (2) 5.0(2.1) (3) 5.6(2.2)</p> <p>*(0=no pain-10=worst pain possible)</p> <p>Data on 52 weeks is in graph format. See limitations of study.</p>	<p>* Mean RMDQ score at 12 weeks (measured right at end of intervention) (1) 11.0(4.9) (2) 11.3(5.1) (3) 12.3(5.0)</p> <p>*Higher scores=worse function</p> <p>Data on 52 weeks is in graph format. See limitations of study.</p>	<p>Mean SF-36 physical health score (1) 41.4 (2) 40.1 (3) 41.2</p> <p>Mean SF-36 mental health score (1) 47.1 (2) 45.2 (3) 44.2</p>	NR	NR	<p>Opioids, n (%)</p> <p>(1) 28 (22.6) (2) 15 (13.6) (3) 11 (18.0)</p>

Reference	Group	Pain, VAS	Function	Quality of Life	Return to Work	Depression	Other
				*Score range 0-100, higher scores=better HRQoL			
<b>Teut M J of Pain. 2016</b> <sup>74</sup>	(1) Yoga (n=61) (2) Qigong (n=58) (3) Control (n=57)	<p>6 months: Adjusted mean Pain Functional Rating Index (0-4) [95% CI] (1) 1.71 (1.50 – 1.91) (2) 1.51 (1.28 – 1.75) (3) 1.83 (1.65 – 2.02)</p> <p>Between group difference yoga vs. control (95% CI) -0.13 (-0.38 – 0.12), p=0.318</p> <p>Adjusted mean average pain intensity last 7 days (VAS 0-100 mm) [95% CI] (1) 42.05 (36.65 – 47.45) (2) 34.14 (28.51 – 39.78) (3) 41.25 (36.07 – 46.42)</p> <p>Between group difference yoga vs. control (95% CI) 0.8 (-6.31 – 7.91), p=0.825</p>	<p>6 months: Adjusted mean back function; FFbHR (0-100) [95% CI] (1) 66.55 (62.89 – 70.21) (2) 69.23 (65.97 – 72.49) (3) 65.25 (62.59 – 72.49)</p> <p>Between group difference yoga vs. control (95% CI) 1.3 (-3.15 – 5.75), p=0.568</p>	<p>6 months: Adjusted mean SF-36 physical component score (95% CI) (1) 36.41 (34.36 – 38.47) (2) 40.01 (37.71 – 42.32) (3) 37.60 (35.45 – 39.75) Between group difference yoga vs. control -1.19 (-3.85 – 1.48), p=0.382</p> <p>Adjusted mean SF-36 mental component score (1) 48.70 (45.82 – 51.58) (2) 48.72 (46.23 – 51.20)</p>	NR	<p>6 months: Geriatric depression scale (GDS) adjusted mean (0-15) 1) 2.76 (2.16 – 3.35) 2) 3.06 (2.54 – 3.58) 3) 3.40 (2.59 – 4.21) Between group difference yoga vs. control -0.64 (-1.55 – 0.26), p=0.162</p>	<p>6 months: Change in % patients taking pain medication from baseline 1) -24 2) -27 3) -21 P=0.861</p>



Reference	Group	Pain, VAS	Function	Quality of Life	Return to Work	Depression	Other
				(3) 48.41 (45.74 – 51.08) Between group difference yoga vs. control 0.29 (-3.27 – 3.85), p=0.873			

## Evidence Tables: Chronic Neck Pain

**Table D7. Summary Characteristics: Studies Identified Through Updated Neck Pain Literature Search**

Reference	Study	Intervention	Comparator	N	Follow-up (Months)	Inclusion	Exclusion
<b>Acupuncture</b>							
<b>Zhang SP Hong Kong Med 2013<sup>79</sup></b>	Double-blind RCT	1) Electroacupuncture (n=103) Acupuncture 3 times a week for 3 weeks; sterile acupuncture needles 25-40 mm long with a diameter of 0.25-0.30 mm inserted into Hegu (LI4, x2), Houxi (SI3, x2), Feng Chi (GB20,x2), Jiangjing (GB21, x2), and Bailao and stimulated with an electroacupuncture machine for 45 minutes. Two additional points could be chosen from tender points or acupuncture points immediately near the tender points	2) Sham laser acupuncture (n=103) Sham acupuncture 3 times a week for 3 weeks; acupuncture delivered via a mock laser pen that only emitted a red light. Patients nor practitioners were informed that laser pen was inactivated. Each point was treated for 2 minutes, with the pen at a distance of 0.5 to 1 cm from the skin	206	6	Adults; chronic mechanical neck pain for ≥3 months	Surgery to the neck, neurological deficits, history of malignancy, congenital abnormality of the spine, systemic diseases; acupuncture in previous 6 months

Reference	Study	Intervention	Comparator	N	Follow-up (Months)	Inclusion	Exclusion
<b>Cho J-H, <i>Acupunc Med</i> 2014<sup>81</sup></b>	RCT Pilot study, assessor-blind	<p>1) Acupuncture plus NSAID</p> <p>Participants took NSAID (zaltoprofen 80mg/day) for 3 weeks while receiving 9 acupuncture sessions (3x/week). Acupuncture methods for Groups 1 and 3: Points selected in cervical region were SI9-12, SI14, BL11-12, TE14-17, GB21. Standard points on extremities were S13, S14, BL65. 0.25mm x 40mm stainless steel needles inserted 20 mm until participant felt acupuncture sensation, then needle left inserted for 15 mins.</p>	<p>2) NSAID 3) Acupuncture</p> <p>NSAID group took NSAIDs daily. NSAIDs were taken 3x/day, and patients were instructed to record missed doses in a patient diary.</p> <p>Acupuncture group received 9 acupuncture sessions total, 3x/week for 3 weeks.</p>	45	7 weeks (3-week intervention)	Age 25–55 years; neck pain or neck and shoulder stiffness $\geq 3$ months; score of $\geq 5$ on the visual analogue scale (VAS) at baseline.	Received acupuncture or NSAID treatment for neck pain within the past 3 months; had serious medical disease or cancer; had history of spinal trauma, had undergone surgery on the neck or had systematic neurological or other skeletal disorders; pregnant or breast feeding.

Reference	Study	Intervention	Comparator	N	Follow-up (Months)	Inclusion	Exclusion
<b>MacPherson, Ann Intern Med 2015<sup>78</sup></b>	RCT Open, pragmatic, parallel-group	1) Acupuncture  12 sessions, 50-minutes each plus usual care. Sessions once/week initially and moved to once every 2 weeks. Sessions based upon traditional Chinese medical theory.	2) Alexander Technique 3) Usual care  2) Participants offered 20 one-to-one lessons of 30 mins duration plus usual care. Lessons once/week, with option of being delivered twice/week initially and every two weeks later. Verbal and hands-on guidance used in line with usual practice.  3) General and neck-pain specific treatments routinely provided to primary care patients, such as prescribed medications and visits to physical therapists.	1) 173 2) 172 3) 172	12	Age ≥18 years; consulted GP in past 2 years for chronic neck pain; neck pain ≥3 months; score ≥ 28% on NPQ for neck pain and associated disability (10 of 36 points for car drivers and 9 of 32 for nondrivers).	Serious underlying pathology; prior cervical spine surgery; history of psychosis; rheumatoid arthritis; ankylosing spondylitis; osteoporosis; hemophilia; cancer; HIV or hepatitis; history of alcohol or drug dependency; actively pursuing compensation or with litigation pending; unable to communicate in English; participation in other trial that may interfere; attendance to 1-1 Alexander Technique lessons within past 2 yrs

Reference	Study	Intervention	Comparator	N	Follow-up (Months)	Inclusion	Exclusion
<b>Tai Chi</b>							
<b>Lauche R J Pain 2016<sup>77</sup></b>	Open label RCT	1) Tai chi weekly 75-90-min (Yang style) session for 12 weeks; sessions included warm up, relaxation period, Tai Chi form practice, educational units, breathing exercises, and relaxation music. Participants received illustrated written info that covered movement sequences learned in the previous session. They were asked to practice Tai Chi outside of classes ≥15 mins/day	2) Neck exercises weekly 60- 75 min session for 12 weeks; basic training of ergonomic principles, proprioceptive exercises, and isometric and dynamic mobilization, stretching, strengthening neck and core exercises, and relaxation exercises. Participants received illustrated and written info and were asked to execute the exercises for ≥15mins/day 3) Wait list Continued usual activities/therapies and offered tai chi or neck exercises at trial's end	114	6	Age ≥18 years; chronic nonspecific neck pain ≥3 consecutive months ≥5 days/week; moderate pain (≥45 mm or higher on VAS 0-100 mm)	Additional low back or arm pain; neck pain caused by trauma, disc protrusion, whiplash, congenital deformity of the spine, spinal stenosis, neoplasm, inflammatory rheumatic disease, neurological disorder, active oncologic disease, severe affective disorder, addiction, and psychosis; pregnant; invasive tx of the spine in previous 4 weeks or spinal surgery within previous year; initiated /modified drug regimen recently; taking opiates; regular practice of tai chi, Qi gong, or yoga in past 6 months

**Table D8. Baseline Characteristics: Studies Identified Through Updated Neck Pain Literature Search**

Reference	Group	Mean Age, yrs	%F	% W	Pain, VAS 0-10	Function	Opioid Use	Duration of Pain	Other
<b>Acupuncture</b>									
<b>Zhang SP Hong Kong Med 2013<sup>79</sup></b>	1) Electroacupuncture (n=103) 2) Sham laser acupuncture (n=103)	45.8	~70	0	Northwick Park Neck Pain Questionnaire score (95% CI) 1) 40.7 (38.5-42.9) 2) 41.1 (38.7-43.5)  Numeric pain intensity scale score (95% CI) 1) 54.7 (50.9-58.4) 2) 51.6 (47.6-55.7)	NR	NR	75.4 months	NR
<b>MacPherson, Ann Intern Med 2015<sup>78</sup></b>	1) Acupuncture (n=173) 2) Alexander Technique (n=172) 3) Usual care (n=172)	1) 52 2) 53.6 3) 53.9	1) 68.8 2) 69.8 3) 68.6	1) 92.9 2) 89.4 3) 88.9	NR	Mean NPQ Score: 1) 39.64 2) 39.38 3) 40.46	NR	Median, months: 1) 60 2) 60 3) 96	Reduced hours or stopped working due to neck pain, % 1) 15 2) 17 3) 19
<b>Cho J-H, Acupunct Med 2014<sup>81</sup></b>	1) Acupuncture (n=15) 2) NSAID (n=15) 3) Acupuncture + NSAID (n=15)	Mean (SD) 1) 39.1 (9.0) 2) 38.2 (10.2) 3) 39.2 (9.1)	1) 53.3 2) 60.0 3) 80.0	NR	VAS Neck Pain within last week (0-10 cm), mean [SD] 1) 6.7 (0.7)	NDI, mean (SD) 1) 23.2 (5.9) 2) 22.3 (4.0) 3) 26.3 (5.0)	NR	NR	Beck's Depression Inventory, mean (SD) 1) 28.7 (4.8)

					2) 6.07 (0.5) 3) 7.1 (1.3)				2) 30.7 (5.6) 3) 33.1 (7.8)  EQ-5D 1) 7.4 (1.7) 2) 7.4 (1.5) 3) 7.5 (1.3)  SF-36 1) 85.2 (1.2) 2) 86.2 (2.0) 3) 84.2 (1.7)
<b>Tai Chi</b>									
<b>Lauche R J Pain 2016<sup>77</sup></b>	1) Tai chi (n=38) 2) Neck exercises (n=37) 3) Wait list (n=39)	1) 52.0 (10.9) 2) 47.0 (12.3) 3) 49.2 (11.7)	1) 73.7 2) 83.8 3) 82.1	NR	Recent pain intensity (0-100 VAS) 1) 54.2 (20.5) 2) 46.2 (19.2) 3) 51.5 (21.1)  Pain considered tolerable (0-100 VAS) 1) 21.7 (14.5) 2) 20.5 (11.7) 3) 20.7 (12.1)  POM (Pain on Movement) 1) 43.1 (19.2) 2) 43.6 (14.6) 3) 41.3 (19.7)	Disability NDI total score (0-100) 1) 30.8 (8.0) 2) 30.1 (9.8) 3) 29.3 (8.2)  Disability in days (VAS) 1) 3.0 (4.5) 2) 4.2 (5.1) 3) 2.9 (3.8)  Everyday function (VAS) 1) 31.1 (24.7) 2) 29.3 (19.7) 3) 30.0 (21.8)	Patients taking opiates were excluded from trial  Previous medication 1) 34.2 2) 56.8 3) 61.5	NR	SF-36 PCS 1) 44.13 (7.0) 2) 41.8 (7.4) 3) 43.6 (7.3)  SF-36 MCS 1) 46.3 (10.3) 2) 46.9 (8.3) 3) 46.9 (10.5)  HADS Depression 1) 3.8 (2.9) 2) 3.8 (2.4) 3) 4.5 (3.0)

**Table D9. Quality Assessment: Studies Identified Through Updated Neck Pain Literature Search**

Reference	Comparable Groups	Maintain Comparability	Double Blind	Measurements Equal and Valid	Clear Definition of Intervention	Key Outcomes Assessed	Analysis Appropriate	Quality
<b>Acupuncture</b>								
<b>Zhang SP Hong Kong Med 2013<sup>79</sup></b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Fair
<b>MacPherson, Ann Intern Med 2015<sup>78</sup></b>	Yes	<sup>36</sup> Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Fair
<b>Cho J-H, <i>Acupunct Med</i> 2014</b>	No	No	No-single blind	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Poor
<b>Tai Chi</b>								
<b>Lauche R J Pain 2016<sup>77</sup></b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Fair



**Table D10. Key Outcomes: Studies Identified Through Updated Neck Pain Literature Search**

Reference	Group	Pain, VAS	Function	Quality of Life	Return to Work	Depression	Other
<b>Acupuncture</b>							
<b>Zhang SP Hong Kong Med 2013<sup>79</sup></b>	1) Electroacupuncture (n=103) 2) Sham laser acupuncture (n=103)	Northwick Park Pain Questionnaire score (95% CI) 1) 33.5 (30.7-36.4) 2) 34.3 (31.1-37.6) p=0.808  Numeric pain intensity scale score (95% CI) 1) 46.8 (42.0-51.5) 2) 43.6 (38.8-48.4) p=0.813	NR	SF-36 PCS (95% CI) 1) 53.0 (52.0-53.9) 2) 53.2 (52.3-54.0) p=0.559  MCS (95% CI) 1) 45.4 (44.5-46.3) 2) 44.4 (43.4-45.4) p=0.246	NR	NR	NR
<b>Cho J-H, <i>Acupunct Med</i> 2014</b>	1) Acupuncture (n=15) 2) NSAID (n=15) 3) Acupuncture + NSAID (n=15)	7 weeks: VAS 1-10 cm average pain in last week, mean (SD) 1) 4.3 (2.0)** 2) 4.5 (2.2)* 3) 3.8 (1.6)**  *p<0.05 **p<0.01	7 weeks: Neck Disability Index, mean (SD) 1) 17.5 (4.9)** 2) 17.3 (5.7)** 3) 17.7 (5.4)**  *p<0.05 **p<0.01	7 weeks: EQ-5D, mean (SD) 1) 7.0 (1.3) 2) 7.3 (1.9)* 3) 6.7 (1.7) *p<0.01	NR	7 weeks: Beck's Depression Inventory, mean (SD) 1) 25.7 (4.4) 2) 28.5 (7.3) 3) 27.2 (6.3) P<0.05 for all	7 weeks: SF-36, mean (SD) 1) 83.9 (1.9) 2) 88.6 (1.5) 3) 84.3 (1.1)

Reference	Group	Pain, VAS	Function	Quality of Life	Return to Work	Depression	Other
<b>Macpherson, Ann Intern Med 2015<sup>78</sup></b>	1) Acupuncture (n=173) 2) Alexander Technique (n=172) 3) Usual care (n=172)		Mean NPQ score (descriptive, unadjusted raw) 3 months: 1) 29.56 2) 32.50 3) 36.30  6 months: 1) 27.00 2) 27.11 3) 33.07  12 months: 1) 26.76 2) 27.14 3) 31.25  Adjusted Mean NPQ Scores (3/6/12 months) Acupuncture vs. Usual Care 1) 37.23/35.35/37.07 3) 43.46/40.90/40.99  Alexander Technique vs. Usual Care	NR	NR	NR	Harms Serious AEs, n (%) 1) 9 (5.2) 2) 13 (7.6) 3) 8 (4.7)  Withdrawals due to serious AEs, n (%) 1) 3 (1.7) 2) 3 (1.7) 3) 0

Reference	Group	Pain, VAS	Function	Quality of Life	Return to Work	Depression	Other
			2) 38.62/32.65/33.39 3) 42.22/37.64/37.18				
<b>Tai Chi</b>							
<b>Lauche R J Pain 2016<sup>77</sup></b>	1) Tai chi (n=38) 2) Neck exercises (n=37) 3) Wait list (n=39)	Pain (VAS) 1) 35.0 (27.7) 2) 33.1 (20.9) 3) 44.6 (20.0)  POM (mean score) 1) 29.1 (19.0) 2) 34.9 (14.4) 3) 45.5 (19.7)  POM=pain on movement	Disability Total NDI (0-100) 1) 24.3 (14.1) 2) 25.1 (12.9) 3) 29.4 (12.7)  Disability in days (VAS) 1) 1.9 (3.4) 2) 2.7 (3.7) 3) 2.7 (3.0)  Everyday function (VAS) 1) 22.0 (24.3) 2) 24.4 (19.6) 3) 29.6 (20.5)	SF-36 PCS 1) 46.5 (8.9) 2) 44.0 (7.5) 3) 42.0 (8.0)  MCS 1) 47.0 (12.2) 2) 46.9 (9.1) 3) 46.4 (10.13)	NR	HADS, depression 1) 4.1 (3.8) 2) 4.1 (2.8) 3) 5.4 (4.0)	HADS, anxiety 1) 6.1 (4.5) 2) 5.5 (3.1) 3) 6.7 (3.4)

## Appendix E. Comparative Value Supplemental Information

**Table E1. Impact Inventory (adapted from Sanders et al., JAMA. 2016;316(10):1093-1103)<sup>106</sup>**

Sector	Type of Impact	Included in This Analysis from... Perspective?		Notes on Sources
		Health Care Sector	Societal	
Formal Health Care Sector				
Health Outcomes	Longevity effects	✓	✓	
	Health-related quality of life effects	✓	✓	
	Adverse events	NA	NA	
Medical Costs	Paid by third-party payers	✓	✓	
	Paid by patients out-of-pocket	✓	✓	
	Future related medical costs	✓	✓	
	Future unrelated medical costs	✓	✓	
Informal Health Care Sector				
Health-Related Costs	Patient time costs	NA	☐	
	Unpaid caregiver-time costs	NA	☐	
	Transportation costs	NA	☐	
Non-Health Care Sectors				
Productivity	Labor market earnings lost	NA	☐	
	Cost of unpaid lost productivity due to illness	NA	✓	
	Cost of uncompensated household production	NA	☐	
Consumption	Future consumption unrelated to health	NA	☐	
Social Services	Cost of social services as part of intervention	NA	☐	
Legal/Criminal Justice	Number of crimes related to intervention	NA	NA	
	Cost of crimes related to intervention	NA	NA	
Education	Impact of intervention on educational achievement of population	NA	☐	
Housing	Cost of home improvements, remediation	NA	☐	
Environment	Production of toxic waste pollution by intervention	NA	☐	

NA: not applicable

**Table E2. Probability of Chronic Low Back Pain Recurrence at Six Months**

	Value	Source
<b>Annual Probability</b>	0.6	Norton et al., 2015 <sup>87</sup>
<b>Six-Month Probability</b>	0.259	Calculation using equation $Probability = 1 - \exp(-rate \times time)$ Rate = 0.6 Time = 0.5 (six months)

**Table E3. Utility Associated with Improvement in Pain**

	Value	Source
Baseline utility in chronic pain state (Ucp)	0.66	Johnson et al., 2007 <sup>15</sup>
Utility as 3,9 and 15 months with improvement in pain (Upi)	0.75	
Intervention Efficacy (IE)	0.60	Calculated as average from all trials
Calculated utility	0.81	Calculation using equation $= \frac{Upi - (1 - IE) * Ucp}{IE}$

**Table E4. Probabilistic Sensitivity Analysis Inputs**

Parameter	Distribution	Range	Source
<b>Transition Probabilities to Pain Improvement from Chronic Pain State</b>			
Acupuncture	Beta	$\alpha = 94.8$ ; $\beta = 63.2$	Cherkin et al., 2009 <sup>11</sup>
CBT	Beta	$\alpha = 55.2$ ; $\beta = 36.8$	Cherkin et al., 2016 <sup>12</sup>
MBSR	Beta	$\alpha = 57$ ; $\beta = 38$	Cherkin et al., 2016 <sup>12</sup>
Yoga	Beta	$\alpha = 49.8$ ; $\beta = 33.2$	Sherman et al., 2011 <sup>13</sup>
Tai Chi	Beta	$\alpha = 40$ ; $\beta = 40$	Hall et al., 2011 <sup>14</sup>
Usual Care	Beta	$\alpha = 47.18$ ; $\beta = 59.81$	Cherkin et al., 2016 <sup>12</sup>
<b>Transition Probabilities of Recurrence to Chronic Pain State (All Interventions and Comparator)</b>			
Recurrence	Beta	$\alpha = 25.9$ ; $\beta = 74.1$	Norton et al., 2015 <sup>87</sup>
<b>Health State Utility</b>			
Improved Pain	Triangular	Min Value = 0.729* Max Value = 0.891* Mode = 0.81 <sup>†</sup>	Johnson et al., 2007 <sup>15</sup> ; Calculation (Wright) <sup>107</sup>
<b>Intervention cost per session</b>			
Acupuncture	Uniform	Min Value = \$72.51 Max Value = \$134.65	Calculation <sup>‡</sup>
CBT	Uniform	Min Value = \$148.24 Max Value = \$275.31	Calculation <sup>‡</sup>
MBSR	Uniform	Min Value = \$41.56 Max Value = \$77.19	Calculation <sup>‡</sup>
Yoga	Uniform	Min Value = \$12.25 Max Value = \$22.75	Calculation <sup>‡</sup>
Tai Chi	Uniform	Min Value = \$12.25 Max Value = \$22.75	Calculation <sup>‡</sup>
Office visit intervention (CPT Code: 99213)	Uniform	Min Value = \$48.49 Max Value = \$69.97	Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services <sup>22</sup>
Usual Care (CPT Code: 99214)	Uniform	Min Value = \$100.07 Max Value = \$140.37	Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services <sup>22</sup>

Parameter	Distribution	Range	Source
<b>Background Health Care Costs</b>			
<b>Chronic Pain</b>	Uniform	Min Value = \$490.81 Max Value = \$911.51	Calculation <sup>†</sup>
<b>Improved Pain</b>	Uniform	Min Value = \$210.91 Max Value = \$391.70	Calculation <sup>‡</sup>

CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction

\*Assumed to be  $\pm 10\%$  of the base-case estimate

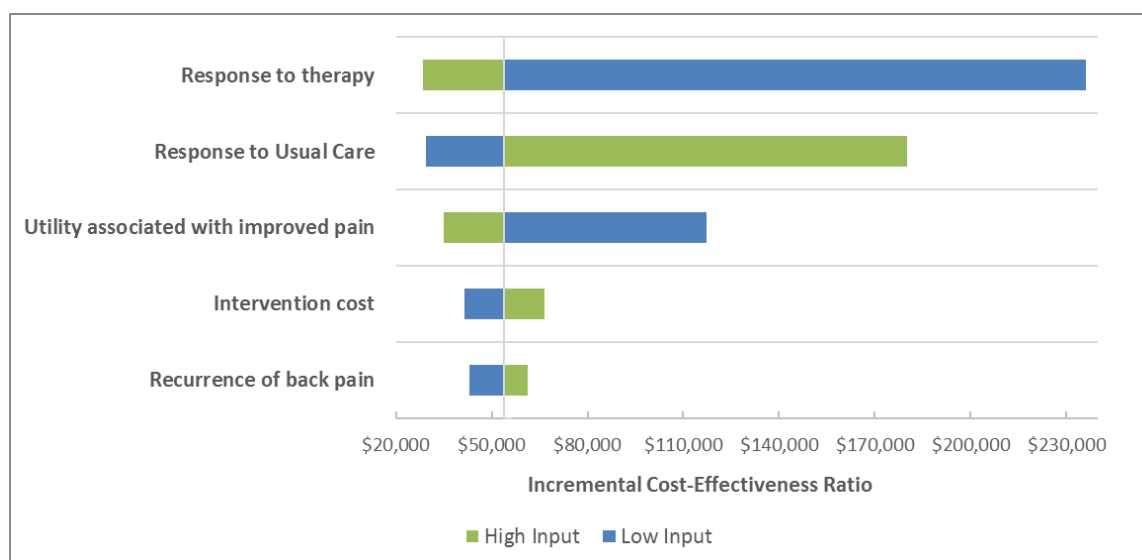
<sup>†</sup>Mode is equal to the mean since we assumed a symmetric distribution

<sup>‡</sup> Assumed to be  $\pm 30\%$  of the base-case estimate

## One-Way Sensitivity Analyses: Results

### Acupuncture

**Figure E1. One-Way Sensitivity Analysis: Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio for Acupuncture Versus Usual Care**



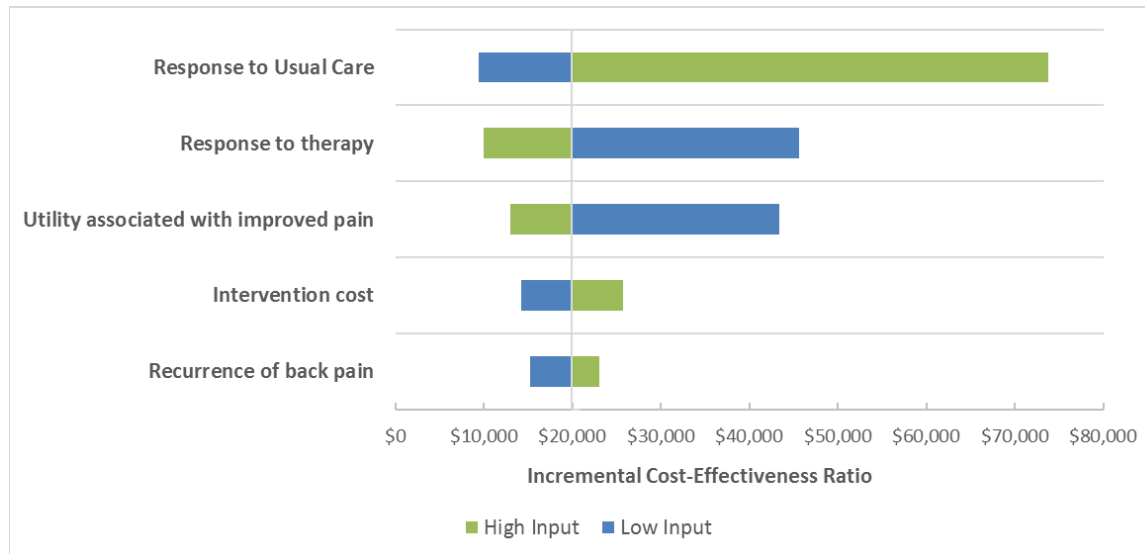
Base-case ICER: \$53,933 per QALY gained

**Table E5. One-Way Sensitivity Analysis: Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio for Acupuncture Versus Usual Care**

	Low Input	High Input	Low Input Result	High Input Result	Range
<b>Intervention Cost</b>	\$82.86	\$124.30	\$41,386	\$66,479	\$25,092
<b>Response to Therapy</b>	0.48	0.72	\$236,284	\$28,443	\$207,841
<b>Response to Usual Care</b>	0.359	0.542	\$29,304	\$180,017	\$150,713
<b>Recurrence of Back Pain</b>	0.126	0.346	\$42,982	\$61,127	\$18,145
<b>Utility Associated with Improved Pain</b>	0.729	0.891	\$117,245	\$35,021	\$82,224

## Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

**Figure E2. One-Way Sensitivity Analysis: Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio for Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Versus Usual Care**



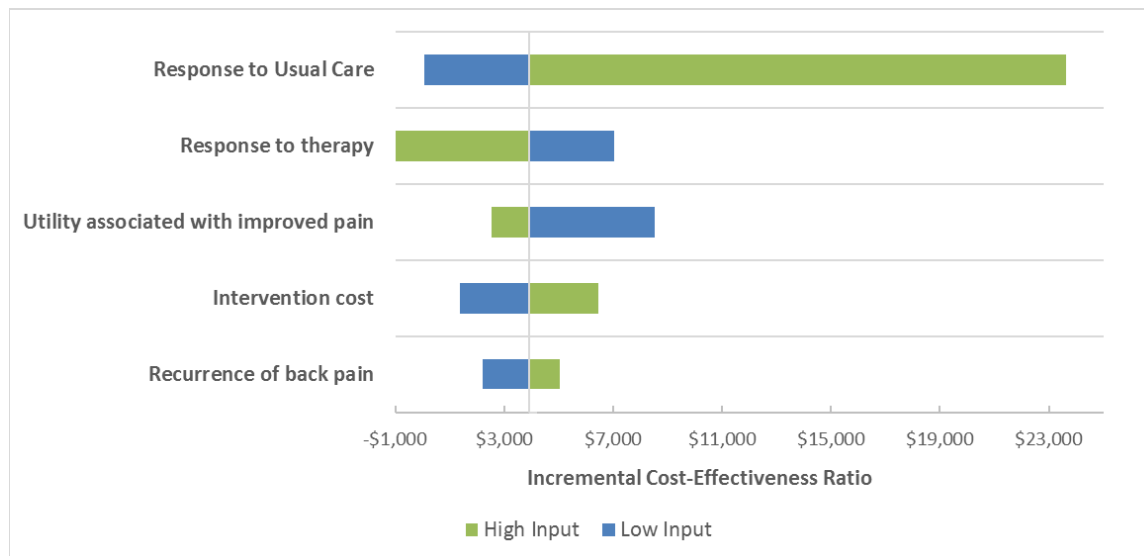
Base-case ICER: \$19,975 per QALY gained

**Table E6. One-Way Sensitivity Analysis: Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio for Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Versus Usual Care**

	Low Input	High Input	Low Input Result	High Input Result	Range
Intervention Cost	\$47.50	\$71.25	\$14,223	\$25,728	\$11,505
Response to Therapy	0.52	0.703	\$45,602	\$10,026	\$35,576
Response to Usual Care	0.359	0.542	\$9,459	\$73,815	\$64,358
Recurrence of Back Pain	0.126	0.346	\$15,299	\$23,047	\$7,748
Utility Associated with Improved Pain	0.729	0.891	\$43,425	\$12,971	\$30,454

## Yoga

**Figure E3. One-Way Sensitivity Analysis: Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio for Yoga Versus Usual Care**



Base-case ICER: \$3,929 per QALY gained

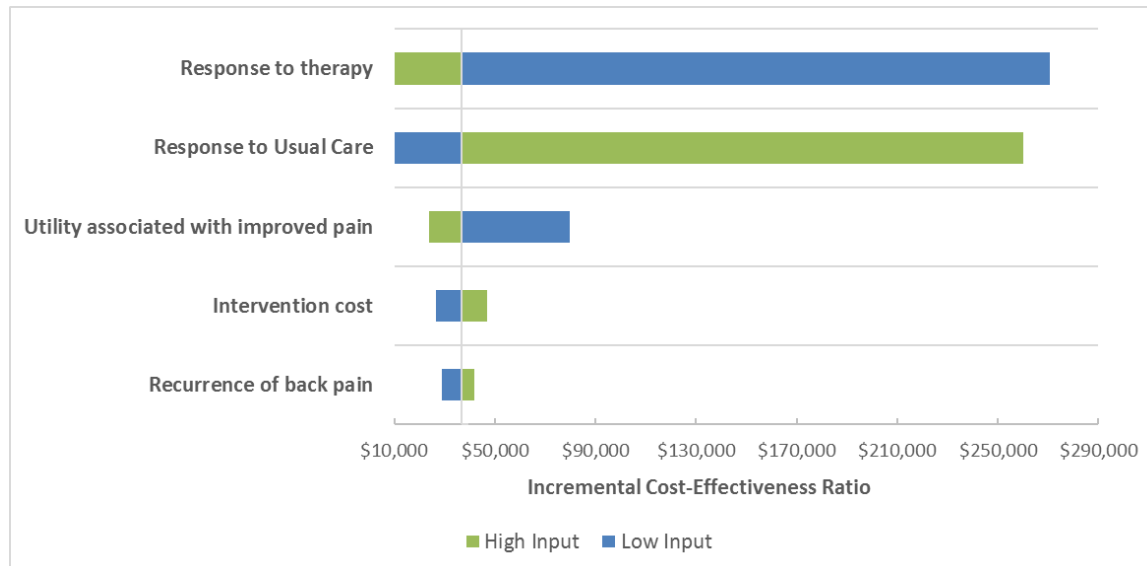
**Table E7. One-Way Sensitivity Analysis: Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio for Yoga Versus Usual Care**

	Low Input	High Input	Low Input Result	High Input Result	Range
Intervention Cost	\$14.00	\$21.00	\$1,386	\$6,472	\$5,086
Response to Therapy	0.56	0.78	\$7,042	-\$988	\$8,030
Response to Usual Care	0.359	0.542	\$81	\$23,631	\$23,551
Recurrence of Back Pain	0.126	0.346	\$2,218	\$5,053	\$2,835
Utility Associated with Improved Pain	0.729	0.891	\$8,542	\$2,552	\$5,990



## Tai Chi

**Figure E4. One-Way Sensitivity Analysis: Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio for Tai Chi Versus Usual Care**



Base-case ICER: \$36,759 per QALY gained

**Table E8. One-Way Sensitivity Analysis: Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Ratio for Tai Chi Versus Usual Care**

	Low Input	High Input	Low Value	High Value	Range
Intervention Cost	\$14.00	\$21.00	\$26,479	\$47,040	\$20,561
Response to Therapy	0.45	0.6	\$270,596	\$10,287	\$260,309
Response to Usual Care	0.359	0.49	\$10,270	\$259,970	\$249,700
Recurrence of Back Pain	0.126	0.346	\$28,982	\$41,869	\$12,887
Utility Associated with Improved Pain	0.729	0.891	\$79,912	\$23,870	\$56,042

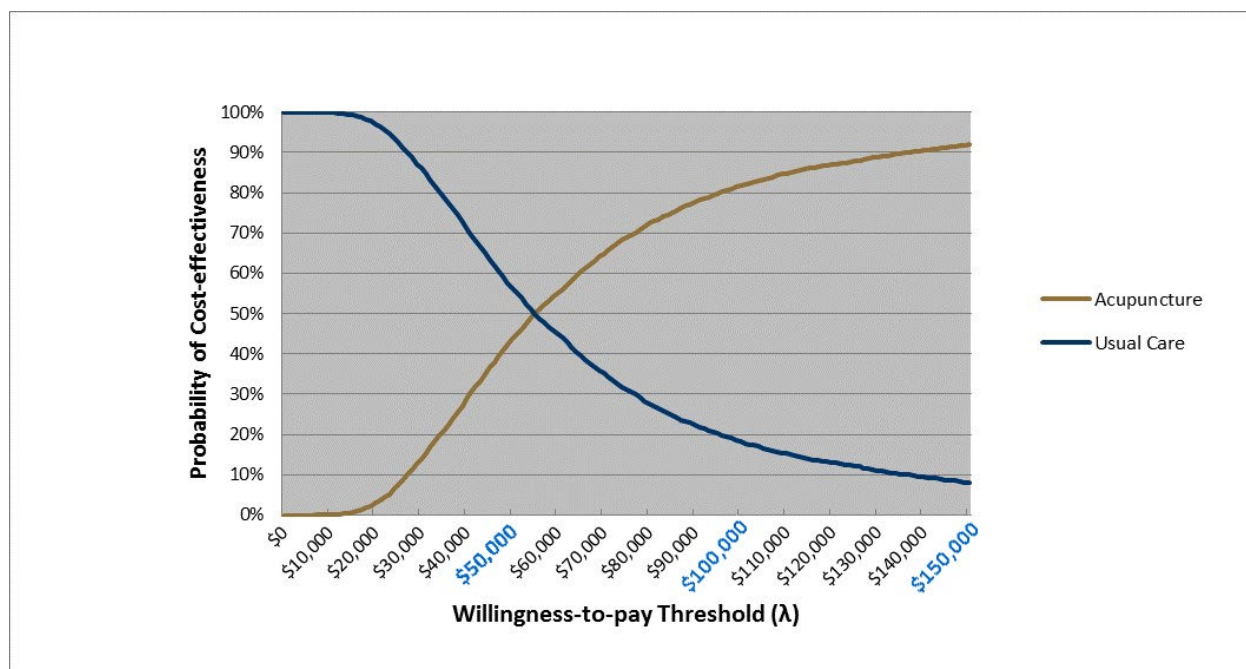
## Probabilistic Sensitivity Analysis Results

**Table E9. Probability of Cost-Effectiveness at Three Willingness-To-Pay Thresholds**

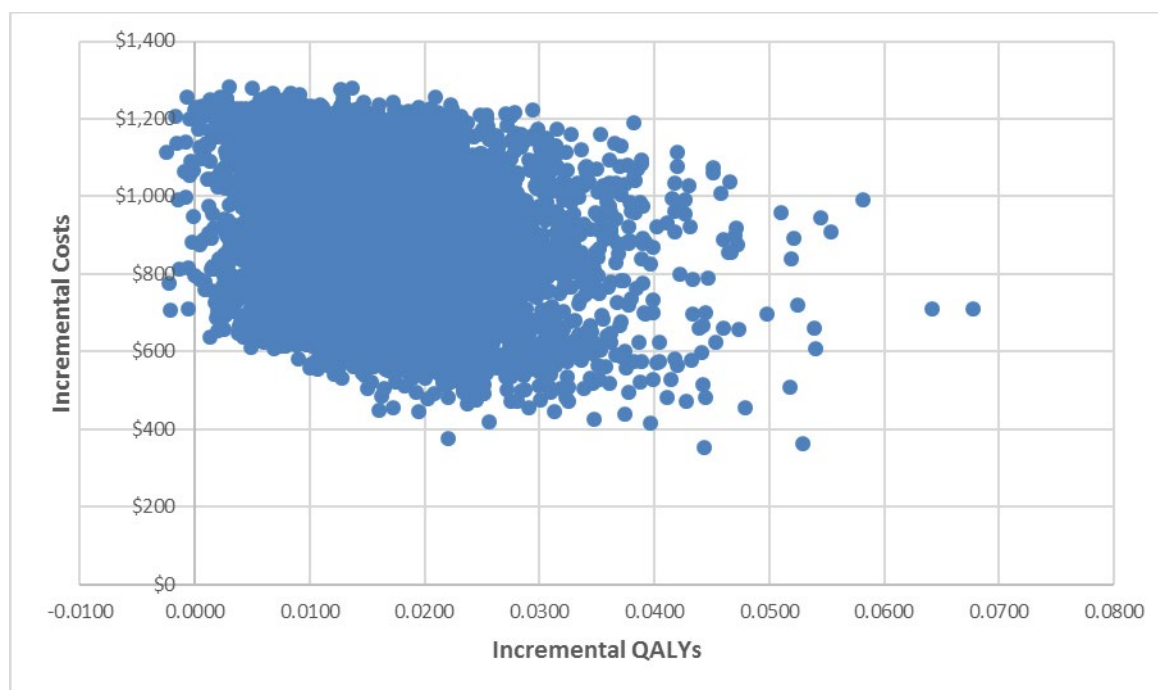
Intervention	Percentage Cost-Effective at Willingness-To-Pay Thresholds		
	\$50,000 per QALY	\$100,000 per QALY	\$150,000 per QALY
Acupuncture	43.80%	81.78%	91.92%
CBT	11.74%	52.16%	74.28%
MBSR	87.14%	95.24%	96.74%
Yoga	96.34%	97.72%	98.10%
Tai Chi	56.58%	67.34%	71.18%

CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction, QALY: Quality-adjusted life year

**Figure E5. Acupuncture Cost-Effectiveness Acceptability Curve**

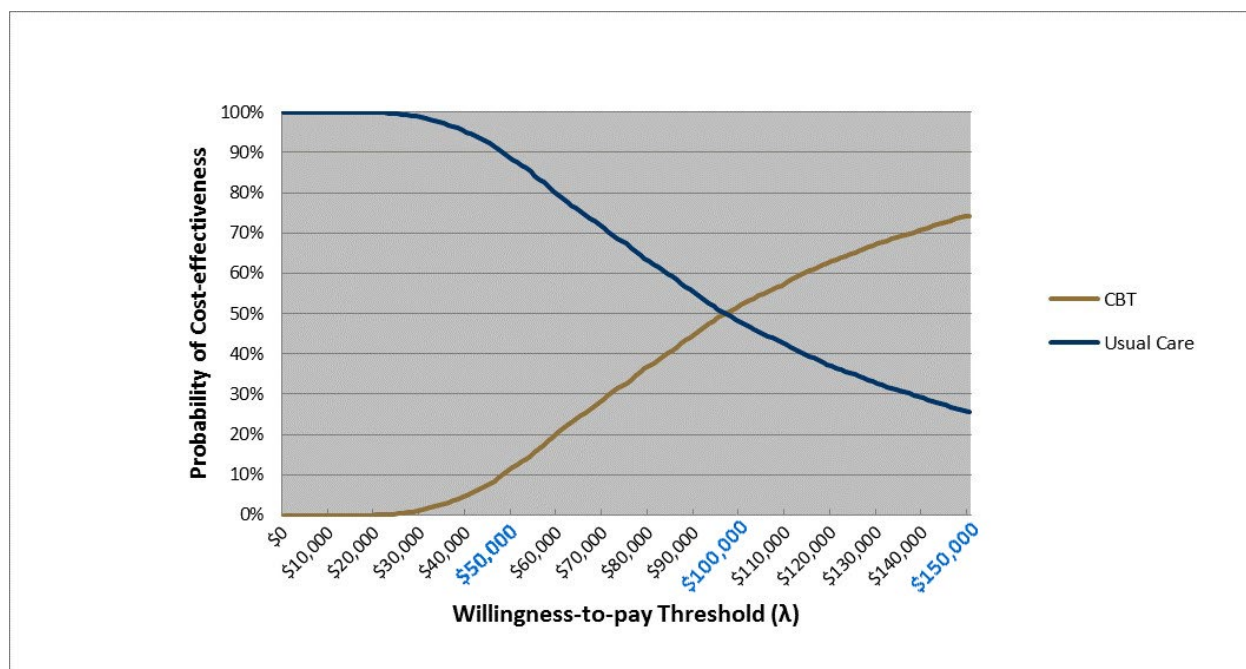


**Figure E6. Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Scatter Plot for 5,000 Simulations of Acupuncture Versus Usual Care**

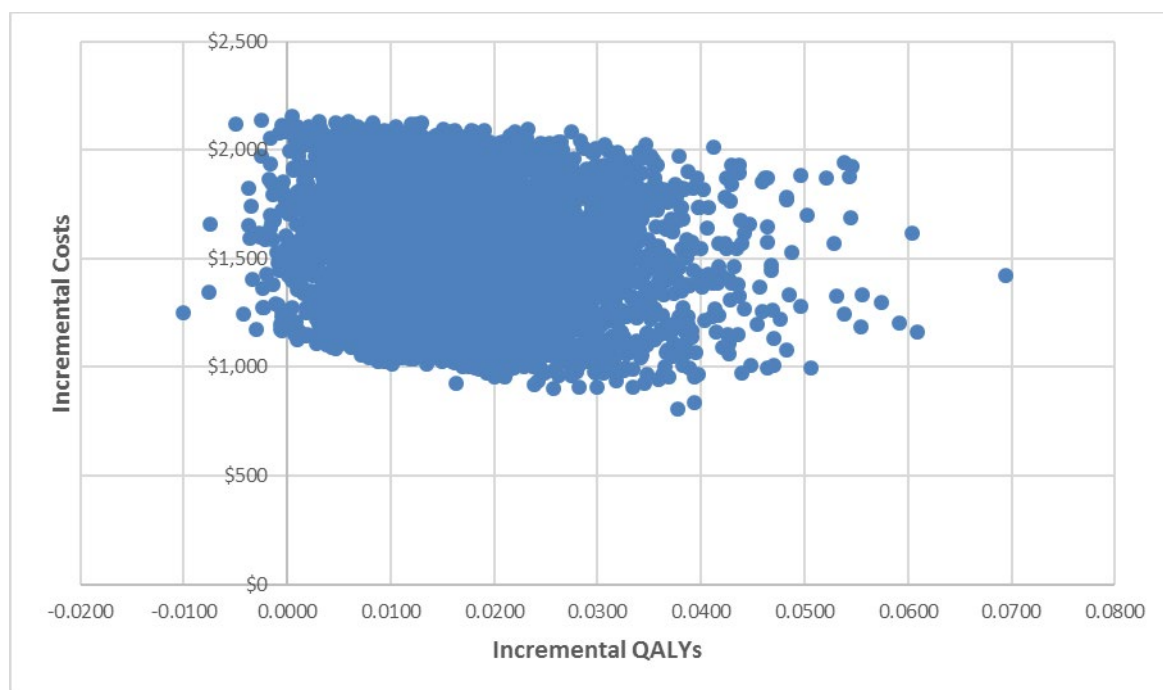


QALY: Quality-Adjusted Life Year

**Figure E7. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Cost-Effectiveness Acceptability Curve**

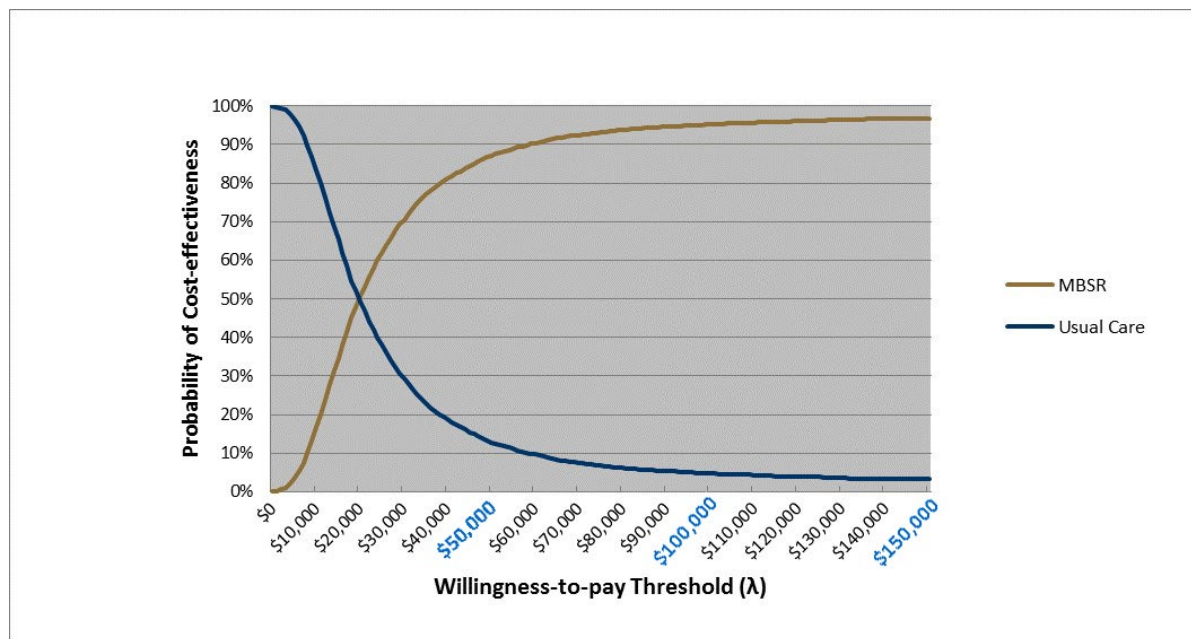


**Figure E8. Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Scatter Plot for 5,000 Simulations of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Versus Usual Care**

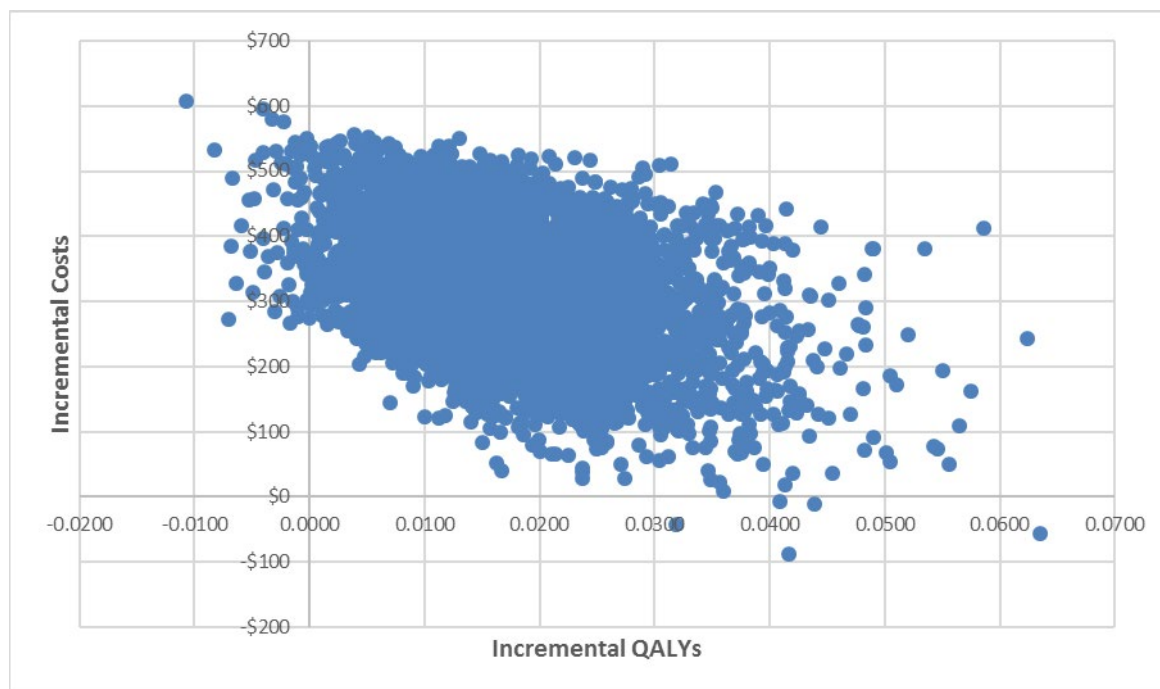


QALY: Quality-Adjusted Life Year

**Figure E9. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Cost-Effectiveness Acceptability Curve**

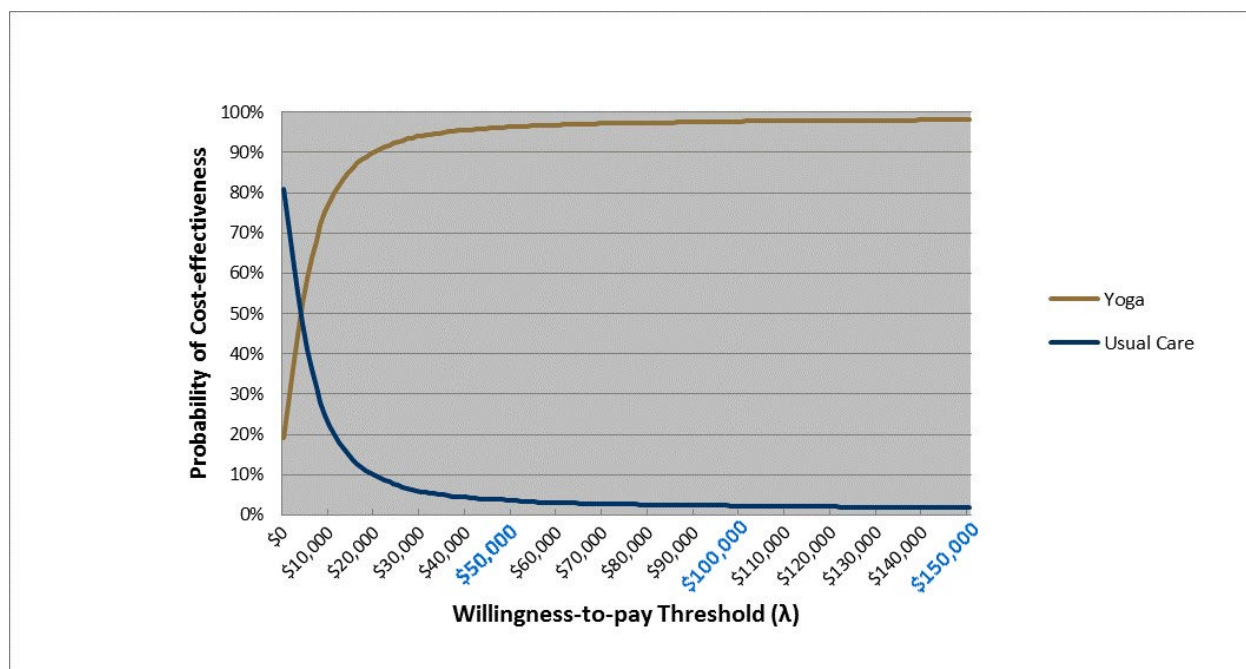


**Figure E10. Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Scatter Plot for 5,000 Simulations of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Versus Usual Care**

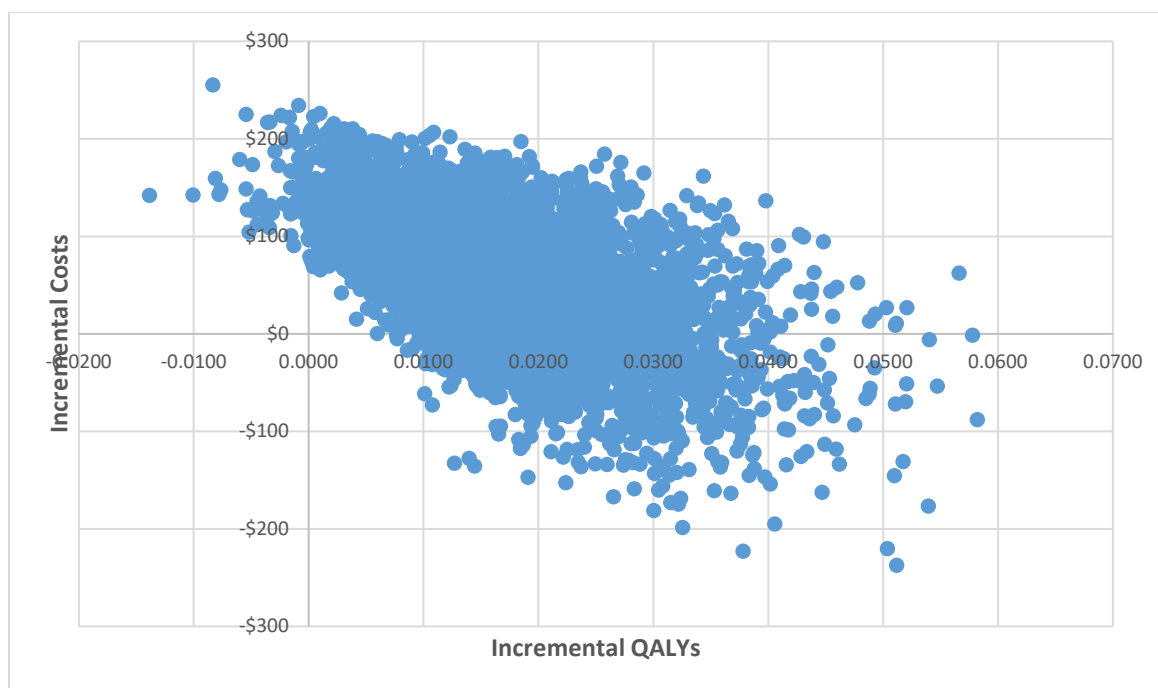


QALY: Quality-Adjusted Life Year

**Figure E11. Yoga Cost-Effectiveness Acceptability Curve**



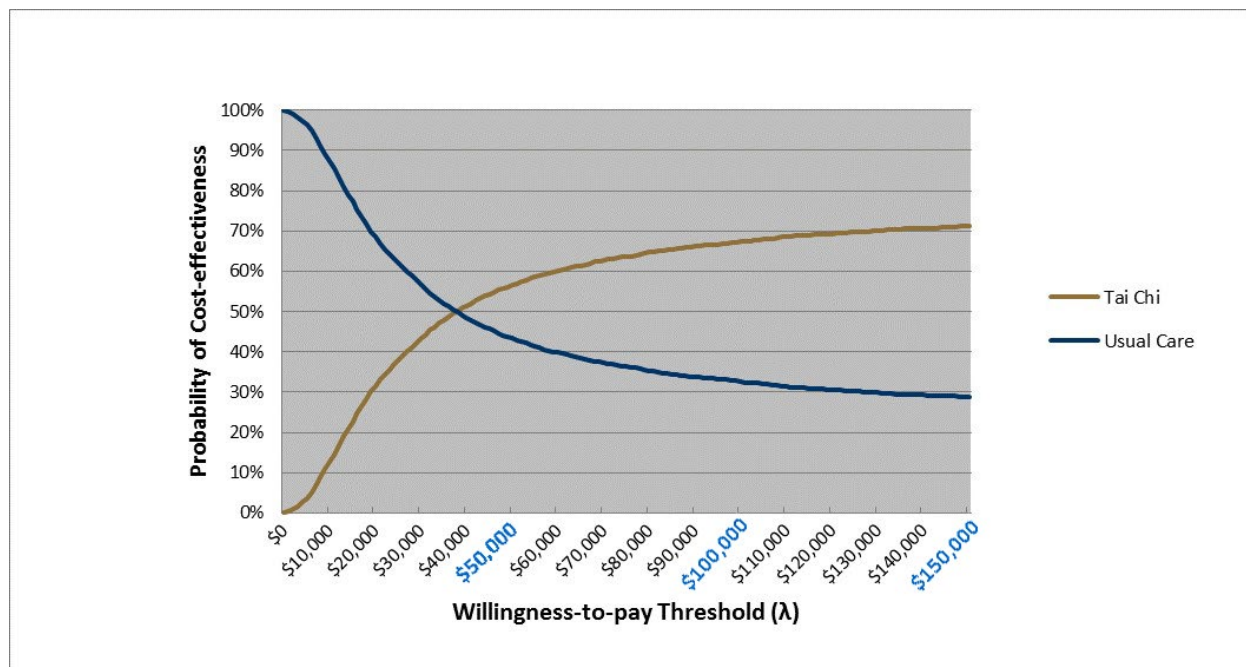
**Figure E12. Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Scatter Plot for 5,000 Simulations of Yoga Versus Usual Care**



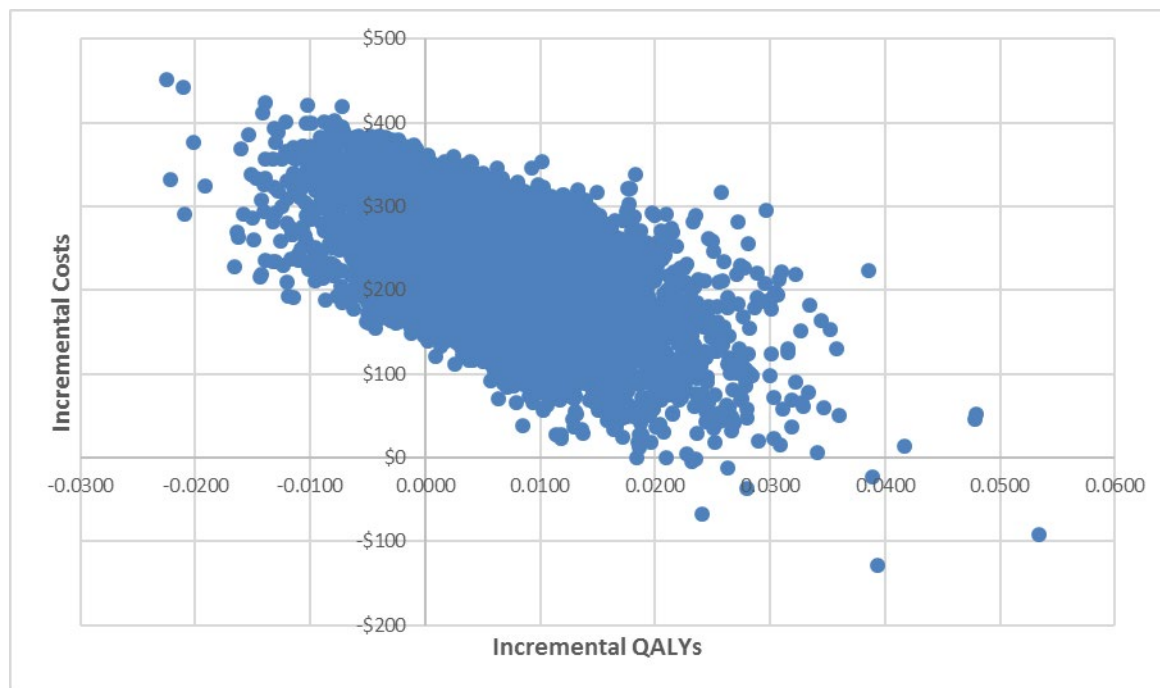
QALY: Quality-Adjusted Life Year



**Figure E13. Tai Chi Cost-Effectiveness Acceptability Curve**



**Figure E14. Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Scatter Plot for 5,000 Simulations of Tai Chi Versus Usual Care**



QALY: Quality-Adjusted Life Year

## Scenario Analyses: Results

### *Varying Time Horizon*

**Table E10. Incremental Cost Per QALY Gained for Interventions Versus Usual Care Over a One- and Three-Year Time Horizon**

	Acupuncture	CBT	MBSR	Yoga	Tai Chi
One year	\$161,530	\$273,774	\$65,921	\$20,742	\$113,177
Three years	\$54,221	\$94,281	\$20,098	\$3,974	\$36,964
Five years (base case)	\$53,933	\$93,799	\$19,975	\$3,929	\$36,759

CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy, MBSR: mindfulness-based stress reduction

### ***Modified Societal Perspective***

**Table E11. Incremental Cost-Effectiveness Results Versus Usual Care from a Modified Societal Perspective Over a Five-Year Time-Horizon**

Intervention	Incremental Cost Effectiveness Ratio (Cost per QALY Gained)
Acupuncture	\$51,989
CBT	\$91,855
MBSR	\$18,031
Yoga	\$1,985
Tai Chi	\$34,815

CBT: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, MBSR: Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, QALY: Quality-Adjusted Life Year



## Appendix F. Public Comments

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*This section includes summaries of the public comments prepared for the CTAF Public Meeting on October 19, 2017 in Oakland, California. These summaries were prepared by those who delivered the public comments at the meeting and are presented in order of delivery. A video recording of all comments can be found here (<https://youtu.be/CE1p4uvegW0?t=1h30m18s>), beginning at minute 01:30:18. Conflict of interest disclosures are included at the end of the statement.*

### **Matthew Bauer, LAc, The Acupuncture Now Foundation President**

The Acupuncture Now Foundation is an international non-profit dedicated to educating people about acupuncture.

The opioid crisis is one of reliance on a pain management therapy with a bad benefit to harm ratio. We should be encouraging pain management therapies with better benefit to harm ratios.

ICER reviewers reported that acupuncture provided “significant effectiveness” in reducing pain and disability for chronic low back and neck pain yet they downgraded it to a “small” net health benefit because of studies that found real acupuncture not outperforming sham.

Promoting therapies that are safe and effective should be the priority, not concerns about possible placebo effects. The Hippocratic Oath implores physicians to “First, do no harm”; not “First, do no placebo.”

Besides placebo, there are three more likely reasons discussed in peer reviewed literature why real acupuncture might not outperform sham: 1. Sticking needles anywhere may cause the body to produce pain reducing and anti-inflammatory chemistry as has been shown in acupuncture animal mechanisms research. 2. Many studies are underpowered using too few subjects to reliably show real acupuncture’s effectiveness over sham. 3. There are no clinical quality guidelines to help researchers ensure the real acupuncture achieves its maximum benefit.

Since the sham acupuncture in these trials may not be a sham, the real acupuncture may not be real, and many trials may be underpowered, acupuncture’s real-world effectiveness ratings should not be downgraded out of placebo concerns.

More information on these research issues can be found on the ANF website.

***Mr. Bauer is a member of the Board of Directors for American Specialty Health Group Inc., a health care company that develops and supports managed care plans for non-pharmacological services including acupuncture, chiropractic, massage therapy, etc.***

## Appendix G. Conflict of Interest Disclosures

Tables G1 through G3 contain conflict of interest (COI) disclosures for all participants at the October 19, 2017 Public meeting of CTAF.

**Table G1. ICER Staff and Consultant COI Disclosures**

Name	Organization	Disclosures
Richard Chapman, PhD, MS	ICER	None
Varun Kumar, MBBS, MPH, MSc	ICER	None
Molly Morgan, BA	ICER	None
Ifeoma Otuonye, MPH	ICER	None
Stephen Pearson, MD, MSc	ICER	None
David Rind, MD, MSc	ICER	None
Matt Seidner, BS	ICER	None
Jeffrey Tice, MD	UCSF	None

**Table G2. CTAF Panel Member COI Disclosures**

Name	Organization	Disclosures
Ralph G. Brindis, MD, MPH, MACC, FSCAI, FAHA	UCSF	*
Christine Castano, MD	HealthCare Partners	*
Robert Collyar	Patient Advocates in Research	*
Rena Fox, MD (Vice Chair)	UCSF	*
Kimberly Gregory, MD, MPH	Cedars-Sinai Medical Center	*
Paul Heidenreich, MD, MS (Chair)	Stanford University	*
Jeffrey Hoch, PhD	UC Davis	*
Jeff Klingman, MD	The Permanente Medical Group	*
Joy Melnikow, MD, MPH	UC Davis	*
Patricia E. Powers, MPA	Center for Healthcare Decisions	*
Rita F. Redberg, MD, MSc, FACC	UCSF	*
William Remak, BsC MT, BPH	Emeritus Board Member, California Chronic Care Coalition	*
Robert E. Rentschler, MD	Beaver Medical Group	*
Alexander Smith, MD, MPH	UCSF	*

\* No relevant conflicts of interest to disclose, defined as more than \$10,000 in healthcare company stock or more than \$5,000 in honoraria or consultancies during the previous year from health care manufacturers or insurers.

**Table G3. Policy Roundtable Participant Disclosures**

Name	Title	Disclosures
<b>Penney Cowan</b>	Founder and CEO, American Chronic Pain Association	None
<b>Catherine Cartwright</b>	Patient; Regional Director, American Chronic Pain Association	None
<b>Julia Logan, MD, MPH</b>	Chief Quality Officer, California Department of Health Care Services	Full-time employee of California Department of Health Care Services (Medicaid)
<b>Ravi Prasad, PhD</b>	Associate Chief, Division of Pain Medicine; Clinical Associate Professor, Anesthesiology, Perioperative and Pain Medicine; Director, Stanford Comprehensive Interdisciplinary Pain Program; Stanford University School of Medicine	None
<b>Robert Saper, MD</b>	Director of Integrative Medicine, Boston Medical Center; Associate Professor of Family Medicine, Boston University	None
<b>Tony Van Goor, MD, MMM, CPE, FACP</b>	Senior Director, Medical Affairs and Medical Director for Policy and Health Technology Assessment, Blue Shield of California	Full-time employee of Blue Shield of California