

WHITE PAPER

A New Blueprint to Develop Impactful Hybrid Pelvic Health Programs Using Pathways

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Overview

Common pelvic health conditions can range from urinary and fecal incontinence to postpartum recovery and pelvic floor dysfunction, and they can affect every demographic, age group, and those with vaginal or penile anatomy. One in three females¹ and one in six males² will have pelvic floor dysfunction in their lifetime. However, despite their prevalence and impact on quality of life and healthcare costs, pelvic health conditions continue to be overlooked and undertreated.

One compounding factor is that the prevalence and risk factors for complications only increase with age. For example, in the United States the prevalence of urinary incontinence (UI) in those 65 years and older is as high as 60 percent for women and 35 percent for men.³ Despite being such common conditions, there are several misconceptions and barriers to care that prevent patients from getting the treatment they need.

With a structured digital pelvic health program, we have the power to improve patient outcomes and satisfaction while also reducing costs. Pathways, our digital musculoskeletal care platform, supplements in-person therapy programs with a variety of care pathways that provide efficient, effective, and personalized care. With Pathways' new pelvic health program, clinicians can provide support tailored for every patient with a scalable, evidence-based pelvic health care delivery program.

IN THIS WHITE PAPER WE'LL COVER:

- Common barriers pelvic healthcare patients face and how to overcome them
- How hybrid care helps reach pelvic healthcare patients wherever they are with phased exercises tailored to each individual patient's needs
- How Medbridge's Pelvic Health Pathways program enhances pelvic health programs to improve patient outcomes, access, and engagement

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The case for pelvic health programs



According to one study, 25 percent of U.S. women reported one or more pelvic floor disorders. Urinary incontinence was the most common disorder reported, with a combined prevalence of 17.1 percent.⁴

While pelvic health conditions affect all patient populations, these issues are more predominant among older adults. Another study revealed that the frequency of pelvic floor disorders increases with age, affecting more than 40 percent of women from ages 60 to 79, and about 50 percent of women 80 and older.⁵

Older adults with UI and other lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) are also more likely to experience compounding negative health consequences. These include functional decline and decreased quality of life,⁶ as well as poor rehabilitation outcomes.^{7,8}

These conditions can also lead to wide-ranging public health implications, including an increase in falls associated with frequent visits to the bathroom, especially among older populations getting up in the middle of the night.⁹ More than 1 out of 4 older Americans have a fall event each year, and falls are the leading cause of injury and injury death among adults 65 and over.¹⁰ Treating UI and LUTS conditions would have a significant impact on fall reduction in older patient populations.

Pelvic health conditions are widespread and have an enormous impact on patient quality of life—so why are patients not receiving the care they need?

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The case for pelvic health programs

Barriers to accessing pelvic health care

Pelvic health issues can be a sensitive topic—though these conditions are common and nothing to be embarrassed about, many patients feel uncomfortable discussing symptoms or the realities of their conditions. The psychosocial effects of UI and LUTS can be just as devastating as the physical symptoms, as UI and LUTS are associated with feelings of embarrassment, stigmatization, isolation, and depression.^{11,12,13} These psychosocial effects of incontinence are also associated with functional decline in older populations,¹⁴ as the use of pads or specialized undergarments can cause the individual to leave home less frequently,¹⁵ leading to decreased physical and social activity, as well as increased infections and falls. People of all ages who have UI often limit their physical activity and exercise due to their symptoms, which can also lead to further health concerns.

Another common misconception is that certain aspects of pelvic health conditions, particularly incontinence, are inevitable with aging. People will often treat the symptoms or adapt their lifestyle instead of seeking care because they don't even realize that treatment for incontinence exists! But prescribed pelvic strengthening exercises or bladder retraining are just some of the ways that patients can treat incontinence no matter their age.

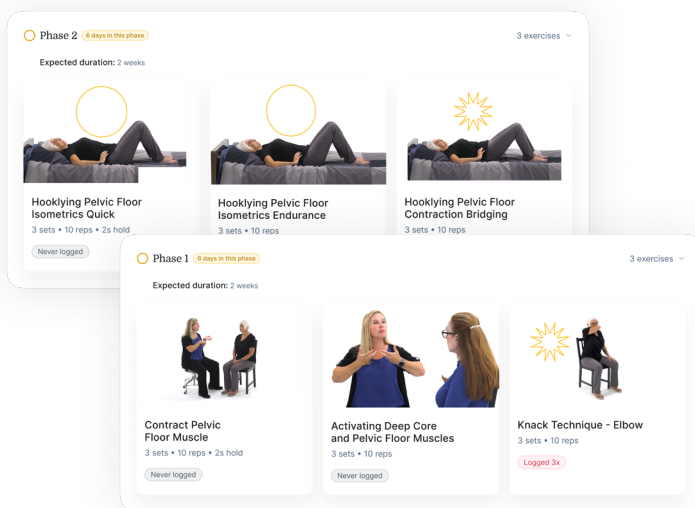
Postpartum pelvic health patients are also susceptible to delaying or declining treatment due to difficulty accessing care. For example, pelvic floor exercises are beneficial for postpartum patients who have been recommended for specific pelvic rehabilitation. However, making it into weekly in-person rehab therapy sessions with a two-month-old is just not realistic for many parents. Then there's the matter of long wait times for pelvic health care (let alone finding a therapist that specializes in the field if you're not in a big city), and it gets even more difficult for patients with young children to get the care they need.

Finally, there are systemic issues that can cause delays or even prevent patients from receiving care. Because it is such a specialized field, there is a lack of clinicians trained in pelvic health compared to those who handle more generalized musculoskeletal conditions. Traditional programs also run into common issues such as manual tracking of patient progression and adherence, inconsistent protocols, and training gaps that are present throughout most therapy programs. Being able to offer hybrid digital care would provide an opportunity to expand outreach to communities with less access to pelvic healthcare.

How Pathways enhances pelvic health programs

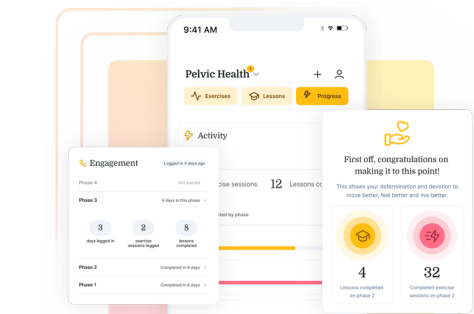
Medbridge Pathways, our hybrid MSK care platform, now has a pelvic health pathway designed to increase access and meet patients where they are to improve symptoms and quality of life.

Medbridge's pelvic pathways can be personalized by the assigning provider to meet the patient's unique needs. Each pathway is broken into multiple phases that build off each other, allowing patients to progress at their own pace. Individual phases are focused on a set of exercises designed to be completed in 15 minutes or less. Every program is reviewed and approved by our Medical Advisory Board, which covers a broad spectrum of clinical roles, including physical therapists, occupational therapists, physicians, orthopedic surgeons, and pain psychologists.



Pathways enables clinicians to reach more patients and provide more flexibility for pelvic health patients who struggle with common barriers to care like busy schedules, commutes, or high costs associated with copays for multiple visits.

Let's take a look at the key features that make Pathways the best option for conservative pelvic healthcare.



Medbridge's Pelvic Health Pathways

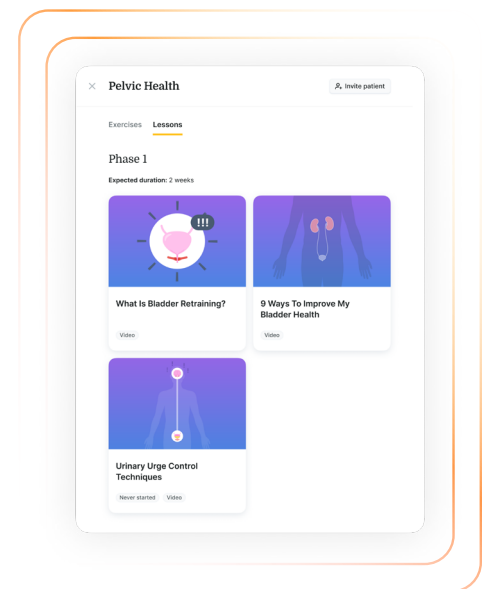
Featuring evidence-based, medical board-reviewed clinical programs, our Pelvic Health Pathways provide support for every patient need.

Educational modules

The foundation of every successful healthcare journey is education. Patients want to know how each exercise helps treat their condition, and Pathways provides interactive education modules that empower patients. For example, many people don't fully understand the workings of the urinary system or how pelvic muscles function, and teaching them is vital to treating incontinence. Education can improve symptoms of incontinence and improve bladder control in many patients.¹⁶ That's why we've incorporated interactive pelvic health education in Pathways, with topics that include:

- What Is Mixed Incontinence? • 9 Ways to Improve Bladder Health
- What Is Bladder Retraining? • Urinary Urge Control Techniques

Evidence shows that online education can result in improvement in symptoms for pelvic health conditions,^{17,18} and if patients can learn about their pelvic anatomy and function, they can learn how to strengthen or improve endurance in these muscles and make the connection to how the prescribed exercises will help. For example, once patients understand how our nervous system signals our pelvic muscles, they can better understand how to control a urinary urge. It also helps with the psychosocial effects of pelvic health dysfunction, as a better understanding of the condition helps reduce some of the feelings of fear and shame that pelvic health patients commonly experience.



Evidence-based exercises

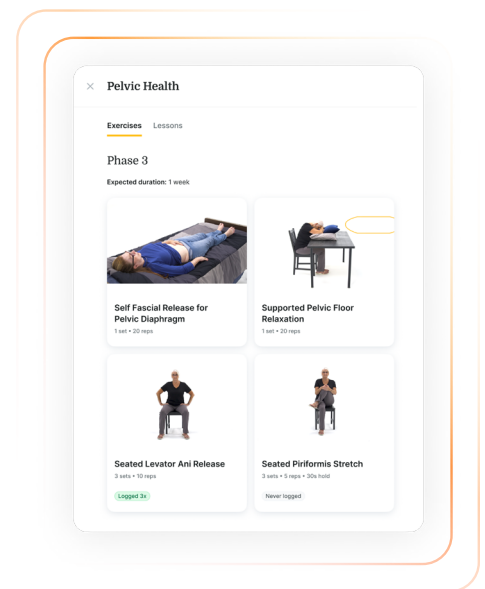


Starting a new home exercise program can feel daunting and unfamiliar, so patients want to know that the effort they are putting into their rehabilitation will help. All Pathways exercises are evidence-based, and the phased progression system helps patients advance at a pace that suits their individual needs.

When it comes to pelvic health rehab, phase-based exercise programs are impactful precisely because many pelvic health exercises aren't innately intuitive. Properly activating pelvic and deep-core muscles or diaphragmatic breathing aren't typically exercises you'd incorporate in your gym routine, and therefore require guidance to perform correctly.

Pathways guides patients every step of the way. The phased progression system allows the patient to focus on coordination, endurance, and strength as appropriate as they progress through their program, tailored to each individual patient's needs.

The convenience of a digital home program can help patients with a variety of needs, like the postpartum patient with the two-month old child. Anyone who has cared for an infant knows that bringing them anywhere is a significant logistical challenge, and even leaving them with a partner or family member can be difficult. Pathways can help with a digital care program that can get this patient the guidance and education they need. Getting them started on a digital exercise program can be conducted in the comfort, convenience, and privacy of their own home.



Digital accessibility



Pathways provides accessible, convenient care and education, providing an easier way to overcome common barriers to care.

Logistical issues make scheduling and attending appointments challenging. Patients may have limited transportation, fixed finances, or lack of specialized pelvic health services available (particularly in rural areas). Pathways can help these patients with these challenges access care, as well as patients who only have a limited number of rehabilitation service visits on their Medicare or insurance plan.

The accessibility provided by digital care can be a powerful tool to overcome the social stigma, fear, and shame associated with incontinence. Many people don't feel comfortable discussing their condition in a public setting, or worry that they'll have an incident with their bladder while on a drive getting to the clinic or during a long wait in a doctor's waiting room. Being able to access treatment from the comfort of their own homes with digital care may help inspire more people to seek out and start a treatment plan.

The Future of Pelvic Health with Pathways

Pathways can help improve engagement and adherence through at-home programs while providing a scalable model that helps organizations expand access to pelvic healthcare. Our pelvic health Pathways program is already helping patients today—and with upcoming advancements like AI integration, we can tailor programs for every patient at scale.

From predictive analytics that will anticipate health conditions based on movement assessments to AI-driven tools that assist clinicians in planning treatment, these innovations will enhance the precision and quality of care. Pathways enables clinicians to reach more patients and provides more flexibility for those who struggle with common barriers that adversely affect patients with pelvic health conditions.

Patients remain in their local healthcare system so they can continue to receive the best possible care. Many digital-only programs pull patients outside of their health system (and in the process making their care information no longer accessible) which hampers care coordination. Pathways, on the other hand, keeps the care provider in charge so they know exactly how their patient is progressing outside of the clinic. When you do this together, it leads to lower overall costs, which helps organizations in value-based models.

Digital accessibility

From a population health perspective, pelvic health Pathways can help provide accessible care to help treat many conditions before they become a larger issue for the patient. Many patients who struggle with incontinence and other pelvic health issues don't know that treatment is even possible, and those who don't receive treatment will have more health-related challenges and are more likely to require assistive care as they age. Pathways can help these patients get care faster with customized education that can help them regain control of their condition. And because pelvic health is such a specialized field, being able to offer a hybrid digital program offers an opportunity to expand outreach to underserved communities with limited access to dedicated pelvic health care.

Helen's Story: A Pathway to Urinary Incontinence Relief



Helen, a **57-year-old accountant**, has silently struggled with urinary incontinence—a condition she dismisses “just a normal part of aging—for years.

Symptoms have become so bothersome that she no longer attends exercise classes for fear of leakage.

At her next doctor visit, she mentions her UI concerns and is referred to a pelvic health PT.



After a 2-month wait, Helen finally sees the PT, who recommends 3-times weekly in-clinic visits, which are incompatible with Helen's work schedule. She attempts a couple of appointments, but can't keep up and stops going.

Her fear of leakage leads to increased isolation as she avoids social and physical activities, leading to feelings of anxiety and depression and a sedentary lifestyle.



Without consistent movement, she begins to notice weight gain, which worsens her incontinence and increases her risk of cardiovascular disease.

Sleep disturbances caused by nighttime incontinence leave her feeling fatigued and unfocused, putting her at higher risk for falls and fractures.



What began as a manageable condition now contributes to broader health challenges, further complicating her care needs.



Within 48 hours, Helen has a virtual consult with the PT, who assigns an appropriate UI pathway for Helen to complete at home along with an in-person or virtual visit in two weeks to check her progress.

This is much easier for Helen to fit into her schedule, and she feels confident about her ability to complete the program and address this issue.



Helen onboards and begins her pathway at home. She completes weekly assessments, logs exercises, and views education.

Regular text and email reminders keep her on track and motivated, and she's already seeing the benefits of the program, which motivates her even further.



She's able to complete her education and exercise program at home without fear of embarrassing incidents in public.

Now, she's back to exercising, managing daily activities with ease, and empowered with tools to maintain her condition.

Conclusion

Despite the widespread prevalence of pelvic health conditions, patients are still not receiving the level of care that they need. If left untreated, these conditions can lead to fall-related health emergencies as well as chronic pain and discomfort that decrease overall quality of life.

With innovative hybrid care platforms like Pathways, we can bring robust pelvic health programs to patients where it's most convenient for them—and when they need them most. We can not only help patients with pelvic health conditions return to function, but also reduce feelings of shame and discomfort so we can help restore the dignity and independence that every patient deserves.

To learn more about how Pathways can help your organization grow your pelvic health program to improve outcomes and patient engagement, request a demo.

About Medbridge

Combining powerful digital patient care tools with the highest quality education, Medbridge is committed to making healthcare better for both providers and patients. Organizations across the care continuum use Medbridge to provide an enriched, digitally enabled experience that engages patients while streamlining and simplifying care. Designed with over a decade of insight from more than 350,000 clinicians and 25 million patients, Medbridge has helped thousands of organizations realize better patient outcomes. [Learn more.](#)

See how Medbridge can help your organization.

[Contact us to request a demo.](#)

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Rachel Kilgore

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Rachel's primary specialty is pelvic rehabilitation. This includes incontinence, prolapse, constipation, pelvic pain, and peripartum issues such as cesarean birth or diastasis rectus abdominis. She enjoys treating general orthopedics, with interest in the back, neck, knee, and shoulders. Additionally, playing collegiate soccer inspired her desire to focus on sports rehabilitation. Currently, she unites these specialties with treatment of peripartum athletes. [Read more](#)



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As Medbridge's Senior Clinical Content Program Manager, Erika del Pozo has managed and produced exercise and education programs for patients since 2021. Erika leads projects from concept to launch, including creating strategic content roadmaps, researching and developing digital patient programs, driving various projects through production, and garnering client insights. An occupational therapist by trade, Erika takes pride in working with subject matter experts to develop patient-first and evidence-driven programs. Erika is also a Medbridge instructor, with [multiple courses on clinician burnout](#).