

WHITE PAPER

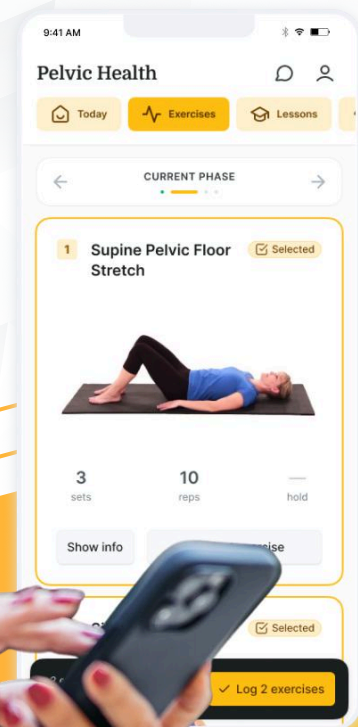
A New Blueprint to Develop Impactful Women's Health Programs Using Pathways

By Medbridge

Dr Milo Paterson

Hi Maggie! It's been a while since we last spoke. How is your pelvic pain doing?

Yesterday at 2:30 PM



Overview

From pregnancy-related support to perimenopause care to pelvic health conditions, women’s healthcare needs are complex and evolve throughout their lives. But despite the prevalence of these conditions, the unfortunate reality is that women’s health needs are often overlooked and undertreated. Barriers to care, systemic inequities, and social stigma all contribute to preventing women from getting the timely treatment they need throughout every stage of life.

However, with structured digital women’s health programs, we have the power to extend access to care to more women to improve patient outcomes and satisfaction while also reducing costs. Pathways, our digital musculoskeletal care platform, supplements in-person care programs with a variety of care pathways that provide efficient, effective, and personalized care. With Pathways’ Women’s Health programs, clinicians can provide support tailored for every patient with a scalable, evidence-based care delivery program.

IN THIS WHITE PAPER WE’LL COVER:

- Common healthcare barriers women face and how to overcome them
- How hybrid care helps reach women wherever they are with phased exercises tailored to each individual patient’s needs
- How Medbridge’s Women’s Health Pathways program enhances care for pregnancy-related pain, postpartum recovery, menopause, and urinary incontinence to improve patient outcomes, access, and engagement

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The scale of women's unmet health needs

Women face significant barriers when accessing healthcare for perinatal-related support, perimenopausal conditions, and pelvic healthcare issues. Research shows that nearly one in five women in the United States live in a “maternity care desert,” where there is little or no access to obstetric providers or birthing facilities.¹ These issues can range from limited availability of specialized providers to systemic inequities in maternal healthcare.

Even when care is available, high costs, lack of insurance coverage, and transportation challenges can prevent consistent access.² Up to 70 percent of pregnant women experience low back or pelvic pain, but less than one-third seek professional help.³

Each year, approximately 2 million women in the US enter perimenopause.⁴ As perimenopause begins, hormones can fluctuate, triggering a range of symptoms such as longer periods of bleeding, anxiety and depression, weight gain, changes in sexual desire, muscle aches, insomnia, and vasomotor dysfunction.⁵ It's estimated that at least 20 percent of women experience symptoms to an extent that significantly impacts their quality of life.⁶

Up to 25 percent of U.S. women also reported one or more pelvic floor disorders. Urinary incontinence is the most common disorder reported, with a combined prevalence of 17.1 percent.⁷ While pelvic health conditions affect women of all ages, 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 ages 60 to 79, and about 50 percent of women ages 80 and older.⁸

These barriers leave many women without the support necessary to ensure safe and healthy outcomes—so why are patients not receiving the care they need?

Where traditional care falls short



Perinatal-related support issues

When it comes to perinatal-related support issues, many problems boil down to a lack of timely care and the complexity of the issues being faced. This can be attributed to many factors, including the perception that pain is a “normal” part of pregnancy and therefore not worth reporting, lack of provider training in musculoskeletal conditions during pregnancy, and limited referral pathways to physical therapy or other non-pharmacological interventions.⁹

But even after giving birth, many postpartum patients still continue to struggle with issues of access and treatment. Postpartum patients are 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 who 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, systemic issues 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 challenges such as needing to manually track patient progression and adherence, inconsistent protocols, and training gaps common throughout most therapy programs. Hybrid digital care provides an opportunity to expand outreach to communities with less access to pelvic healthcare.

Perimenopause and midlife women’s health changes

Perimenopause is a widespread but under-recognized health transition affecting millions of U.S. women annually.

Perimenopause care often falters due to limited awareness of its wide-ranging symptoms and a lack of knowledge and treatment options. Symptoms can be subtle or miscategorized, and the difficulty in diagnosing perimenopause without a definitive test can lead to providers often misattributing symptoms to stress or aging.

91%

of women do not feel they have enough information about menopause.

36%

did not feel comfortable talking about menopause with a healthcare professional.¹⁰

Early education, accessible treatment options, and lifestyle support can significantly improve quality of life. Addressing knowledge gaps and expanding safe therapies remain crucial for better outcomes.

Barriers to accessing lifelong pelvic healthcare

Regardless of whether a woman has become pregnant or not, pelvic healthcare is a significant factor in overall health. Pelvic healthcare conditions can lead to wide-ranging public health implications, including an increase in falls associated with frequent visits to the bathroom, especially among older populations who get up in the middle of the night.¹¹ More than one out of four older Americans have a fall event each year, and falls are the leading cause of injury and injury death among adults 65 and over.¹² Treating urinary incontinence (UI) and lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) would have a significant impact on fall reduction in older patient populations.

Pelvic health issues can also be a sensitive topic. Although 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.^{13,14,15} These psychosocial effects of incontinence are also associated with functional decline in older populations,¹⁶ as the use of pads or specialized undergarments can cause the individual to leave home less frequently,¹⁷ 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.



How Pathways enhances women's health programs

Medbridge Pathways, our hybrid MSK care platform, now has women's health pathways, designed to increase access and meet patients where they are to improve symptoms and quality of life.

Medbridge's women's health 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 patients who struggle with common barriers to care, such as 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 and pregnancy-related therapy care.

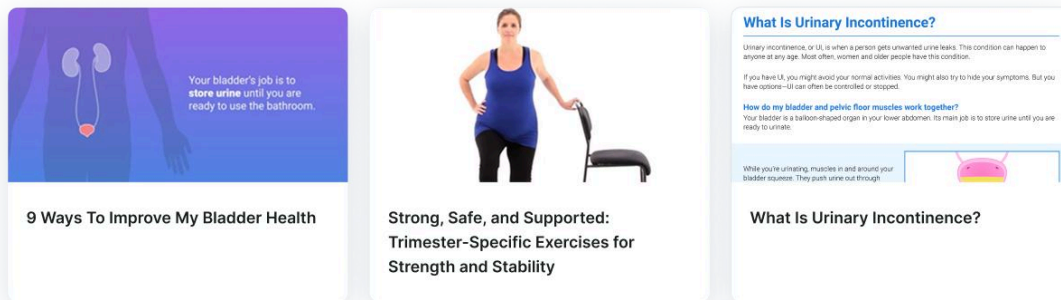
Educational modules

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.¹⁸ That's why we've incorporated interactive women's health education in Pathways, with topics that include:

- ▶ 9 Ways to Improve Bladder Health
- ▶ What Is Urinary Incontinence?
- ▶ Pregnancy Support Belts 101: Ease Hip, Back, and Pelvic Pain
- ▶ Is This Perimenopause? The First Signs to Watch For
- ▶ Pain-Free Movement in Pregnancy: Easy Tips for Daily Activities
- ▶ Strong, Safe, and Supported: Trimester-Specific Exercises for Strength and Stability
- ▶ How to Feel Heard: A Guide to Menopause Conversations With Your Care Team

CONTINUED: HOW PATHWAYS ENHANCES WOMEN'S HEALTH PROGRAMS



Evidence shows that online education can improve pelvic health condition symptoms,^{21,22} and that patients who are educated about their pelvic anatomy and function can learn how to strengthen or improve endurance in these muscles and make the connection to how the prescribed exercises help. For example, once patients understand how the nervous system signals pelvic muscles, they can better understand how to control a urinary urge.

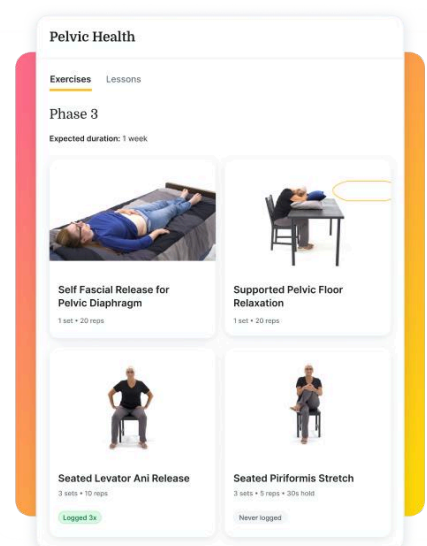
Education also helps with the psychosocial effects of pelvic health dysfunction, as a better understanding of the condition helps reduce some of the feelings of fear and shame that patients commonly experience.

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 women's pelvic health or postpartum 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 they require guidance to perform properly.

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 suit their individual needs. Pathways goes beyond the typical kegels and pelvic floor exercises and takes a holistic approach to treat the whole body, so women can get back to doing what they love.

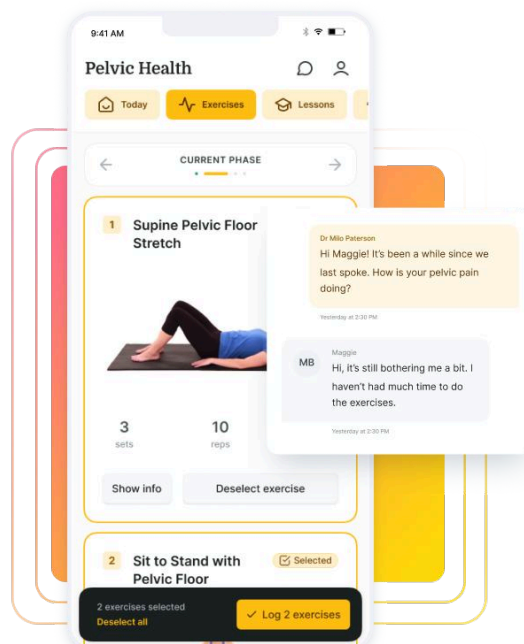


Digital Accessibility

Pathways provides accessible, convenient care and education, as well as an easier way to overcome common barriers to care. The convenience of a digital home program helps a variety of patients, 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 leaving them with a partner or family member isn't always an option.

Common logistical issues also make scheduling and attending appointments challenging. Patients may have limited transportation, fixed finances, or a lack of specialized women's health services available—[particularly in rural areas](#). Pathways can help 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.

And for patients experiencing incontinence, the accessibility provided by digital care can be a powerful tool to overcome the social stigma, fear, and shame associated with this condition. Many people don't feel comfortable discussing their condition in a public setting. They may also worry that they'll have an incident with their bladder while on their way to the clinic or while waiting for their appointment. 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 women's 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 women's healthcare. Our Women's Health Pathways program is already helping patients today—and with advancements like AI integration, we can tailor programs for every patient at scale.

From predictive analytics 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, making their care information no longer accessible and hampering 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. Altogether, this leads to lower overall costs, helping organizations in value-based models.

From a population health perspective, Women's Health Pathways can 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 may 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 and maternity-related care are such specialized fields, hybrid digital programs offer an opportunity to expand outreach to underserved communities with limited access to dedicated healthcare.

Conclusion

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

With innovative hybrid care platforms like Pathways, we can bring robust women's 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, restoring the dignity and independence that every person deserves. We can help women experience the joy of motherhood without suffering in silence, because discomfort and pain shouldn't be a secondary concern to caring for their new baby. And we can help women experiencing perimenopause navigate this challenging time with the support they require, rather than treating this life transition as an afterthought.

[Request a demo today](#) to learn more about how Pathways can help your organization grow its women's health program to improve outcomes and patient engagement. And if you're looking for a more comprehensive care experience, talk to us about [Medbridge One Care](#). One Care combines Pathways with our award-winning Home Exercise Programs, as well as Remote Therapeutic Monitoring and Patient-Reported Outcomes to complete the cycle of patient engagement and ensure patients' needs are heard and addressed.

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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