



PABC BRIEFING NOTE	
TITLE:	Expanding Diagnostic Imaging Access in British Columbia: How Physiotherapists Can Support Timely, Cost-Effective, and Integrated Care
INTENDED FOR:	Nurse Practitioners and Physicians
DATE:	February 3, 2026
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Background

Physiotherapists (PTs) in British Columbia are currently not allowed to order diagnostic imaging (like X-rays or MRIs). This creates unnecessary delays for patients, adds pressure on physicians and nurse practitioners, and underuses the training and skills of physiotherapists—especially when treating active individuals with musculoskeletal issues.

The Physiotherapy Association of BC (PABC) recommends that the government update legislation, regulations, and policies to allow PTs with advanced training to order diagnostic imaging as a restricted activity.

Our Key Recommendations:

1. Include coverage under MSP so patients are not out of pocket.
2. Define education and training requirements through the College of Health and Care Professionals of BC (CHCPBC).
3. Implement a formal evaluation after two years to assess the impact.

Research shows that when PTs can order imaging:

- They do so appropriately and responsibly.
- Imaging often changes how patients are treated, leading to better outcomes.
- Diagnoses made by PTs align closely with those made by physicians
- Costs to the system go down.
- Physicians' time is freed up, allowing them to focus on more complex cases.

Other provinces in Canada already allow this. In BC, both the UBC Department of Physical Therapy and CHCPBC are ready to support the education and regulation needed. Major clinical partners, including BC Children's Hospital Orthopaedics and the Brenda & David McLean Integrated Spine Clinic, also back this change.

Allowing PTs to order imaging supports team-based care, improves access, and reduces wait times—all of which align with BC's broader goals for health care transformation.

Discussion

BC's health care system is stretched:

- 1 in 4 residents lacks access to a primary care provider.
- Emergency department closures and wait times for specialists are worsening.
- The province faces a record \$11.6B deficit, demanding smarter health care delivery.



PTs already diagnose and manage diseases, disorders, and conditions but are not permitted to order the very imaging they need to confirm diagnoses. This regulatory gap creates unnecessary delays, duplicate visits, and missed opportunities for early intervention.

System-Level Alignment

This proposal directly aligns with the health care optimization strategies of both the Doctors of BC and the BC Ministry of Health, supporting more efficient, team-based, and patient-centered care delivery.

1. Doctors of BC – Team-Based Care Advocacy

Doctors of BC has long emphasized the importance of integrated, team-based models to improve continuity and access. Their 2023 *Scope of Practice for Health Professionals Policy Statement* advocates for utilizing all regulated health professionals to their full training and scope to ease system overload and support collaborative care.

2. BC Ministry of Health – Primary Care Strategy

The Ministry of Health's 2025 *Strengthening Primary Care* report highlights a system-wide transition toward Primary Care Networks and Urgent and Primary Care Centres—models where allied health professionals, including PT, play a vital role in closing attachment gaps and improving access to culturally safe, timely care.

The Ministry's 2025/26–2027/28 *Service Plan* further emphasizes scope optimization and enhanced team-based care as critical strategies for system transformation. Enabling PTs to order diagnostic imaging within these models reflects the Ministry's commitment to delivering comprehensive, coordinated, and integrated care that meets patients where they are.

Jurisdictional Snapshot: PT Diagnostic Imaging Authority in Canada

- **British Columbia:** Previously, PTs were able to order diagnostic imaging through delegated authority from physicians. However, this practice was recently halted by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC, leaving PTs without direct or delegated access.
- **Alberta:** Since 2011, PTs with advanced training have been authorized to independently order X-rays, MRIs, and ultrasounds, under a clearly defined regulatory framework.
- **Nova Scotia:** In 2024, PTs in private practice were granted authority to order X-rays. PTs in public practice already had access to diagnostic imaging under existing models, improving consistency across sectors and streamlining care.
- **Quebec:** Since 2020, ordering diagnostic imaging has been a formally authorized act within PT scope.
- **Prince Edward Island & Yukon:** PTs in both jurisdictions have been granted diagnostic imaging privileges, contributing to timely access to care in smaller and often underserved regions.
- **Ontario:** A recent public consultation concluded with strong support for expanding PT scope. A legislative amendment is expected in the near future, further aligning the province with international and national trends.

Recommendation

The *Physical Therapists Regulation* should be updated to include ordering diagnostic imaging within the scope of practice for PTs in British Columbia. It is PABC's position that it is not within the scope of authorized PTs to interpret diagnostic imaging. This responsibility lies with the radiologist who provides a report to the referring therapist.