

CHINA CHRONIC PAIN CARE PROVIDER GUIDE



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Your guide to chronic pain care providers in China

Defined as pain that lasts for three months or more, chronic pain lingers in the nervous system for weeks, months, years, or even an entire lifetime. Those seeking relief from this debilitating disorder can avail themselves of a range of treatment options, including surgery for more severe conditions. There are, however, a number of non-invasive chronic pain care options that you might want to consider first, chief among them being chiropractic, osteopathic, and physiotherapeutic treatment.

Curated by Pacific Prime China's team of health insurance experts, this comprehensive guide answers some of the most commonly-asked questions about chronic pain treatment in China, including:

- What is chronic pain?
- How is chronic pain treated?
- What are the similarities and differences between chiropractic, osteopathic, and physiotherapeutic care?
- What can I expect from a typical chiropractic, osteopathic, or physiotherapeutic consultation?
- How much does each treatment session cost in Shanghai and Beijing?
- Does my health insurance plan cover chiropractic, osteopathic, and physiotherapeutic treatment?

It's important to note here that the content in this guide is intended for informative purposes only, and not meant to replace the advice of a medical doctor. Always seek advice from a medical professional before proceeding with any treatments.

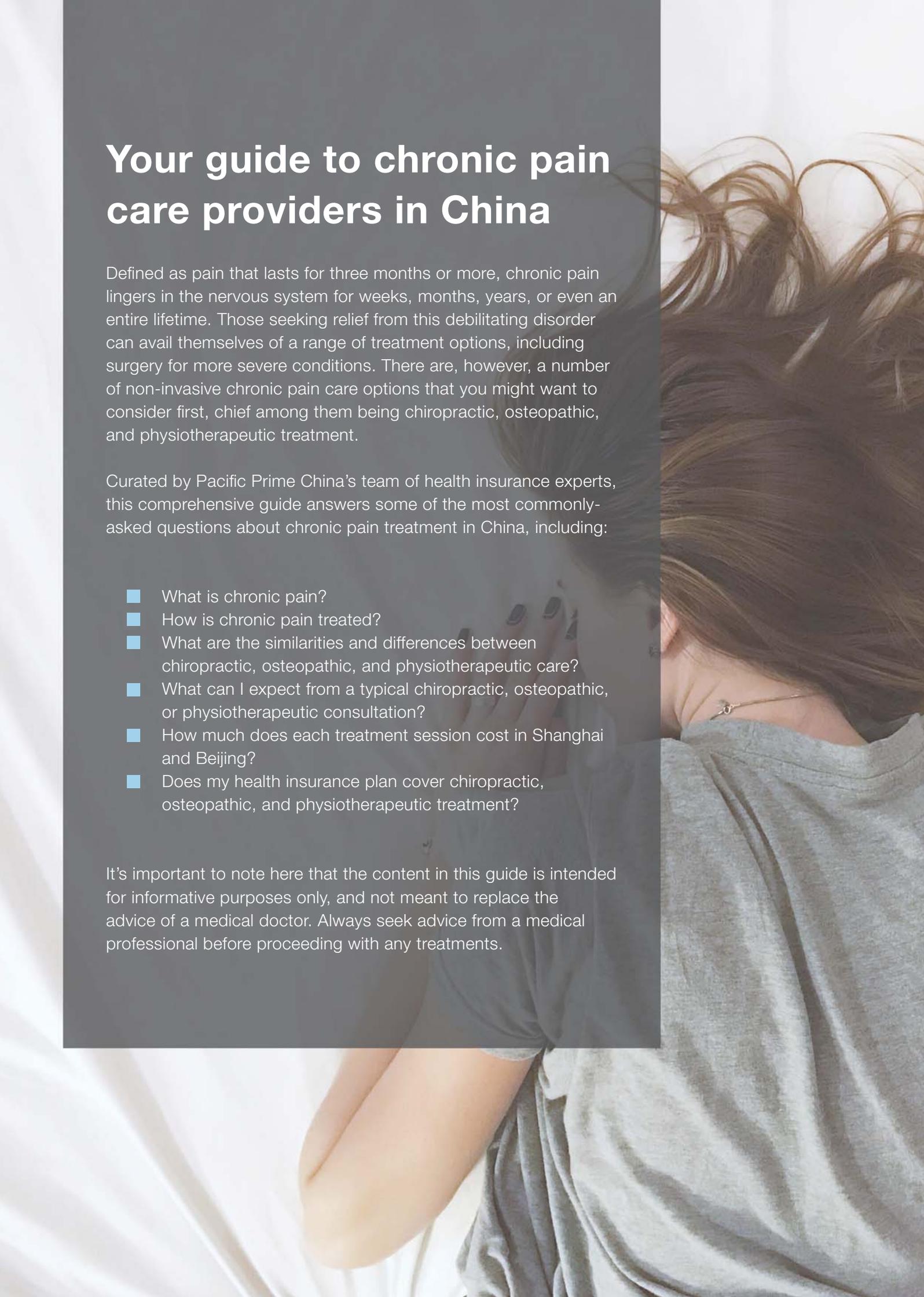


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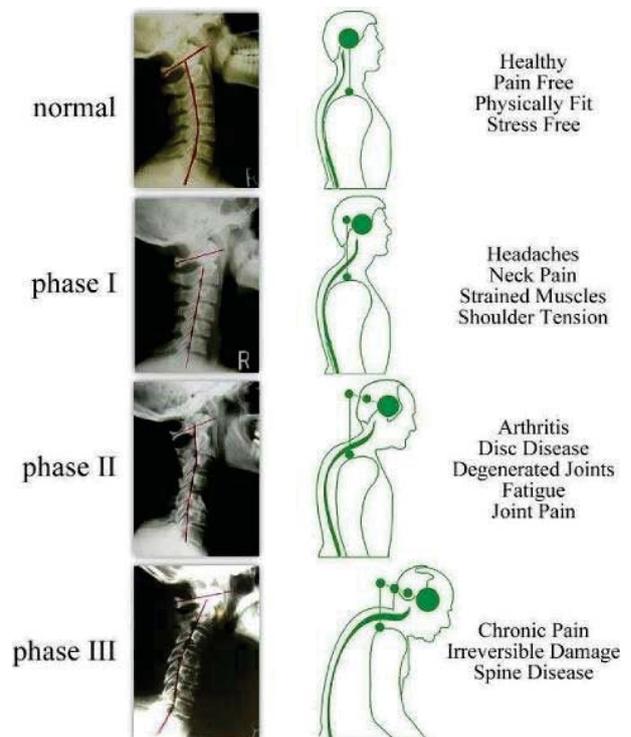
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What is chronic pain?

Virtually everyone experiences pain from time to time. This may be in the form of a headache, migraine, neckache, lower backache, or another form of acute pain¹. If these pain symptoms are ignored without being treated, in some cases they can manifest into chronic pain. Typically defined as pain that lasts for 12 weeks or more, chronic pain persists - firing in the nervous system for weeks, months, or even years.

Due to the “invisible” nature of chronic pain, the daily realities of sufferers’ lives are often not publicly known. In fact, in [this article](#) one sufferer likened living with chronic body pain to “walking painfully through a jungle, completely engulfed in a thick, disorientated fog”. What many people don’t know is that chronic pain can be so intense that it limits one’s movement, making it difficult for them to carry out normal day-to-day activities properly.

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Chronic pain can affect nearly any part of a person's body. It usually falls into the below two categories:

Nociceptive pain	This is caused by pain detected in the body's soft tissues (e.g. muscles and skin). Examples of nociceptive pain include headaches and arthritis. It is usually characterized by sharp, aching, or throbbing pain.
Neuropathic pain	This occurs when the nerves are not functioning "normally" (e.g. nerve disturbances, nerve irritation, nerve damage). Examples of neuropathic pain include phantom limb pain and sciatica. People often describe neuropathic pain as a burning or heavy sensation.

Chronic pain usually occurs as a result of an initial injury, such as back or muscle strain. Sometimes, it can also be caused by an **underlying health condition**, like fibromyalgia (widespread pain in the bones and muscles).

¹ Acute pain emerges quickly, and can feel sharp and severe. It is usually caused by something specific, and goes away when there's no longer an underlying cause for the pain.





How is chronic body pain **treated?**

The main goal of treatment is to decrease pain, reduce the use of medication, and boost physical mobility. For those who have severe pain or have suffered for long periods of time, surgical intervention might be the best answer.

However, before you decide to resort to drastic measures like surgery, you might also want to keep in mind the range of non-invasive treatment options available in China, the most popular being [chiropractic](#), [osteopathic](#), and [physiotherapeutic](#) treatment.

Chiropractic v.s. Osteopathy v.s. Physiotherapy

If you've ever suffered from body aches (e.g. sore back), there's a good chance you've sought treatment from a chiropractor, osteopath, or physiotherapist. Apart from doctors' licences and education, there are a number of subtle similarities and key differences between the three types of chronic pain care providers.

What are the main similarities between chiropractic, osteopathic, and physiotherapeutic care?

The distinction between the three can be quite nebulous; the main reason for which being that they all apply similar techniques to treat patients. The similar techniques used by chiropractors, osteopaths, and physiotherapists include things like massage, osteopathy, joint manipulation, physical therapy, and sport medicine. Another key similarity is that they all educate their patients on home-based rehabilitation exercises post-treatment.

Session duration

You can expect session times to be fairly similar with these various care providers. The initial appointment will typically take up to 1 hour (including consultation and treatment). During this time, the practitioner will go through your medical history and chief complaints², and then proceed to formulate a tailored treatment/exercise plan. Each subsequent appointment will normally take about 30 minutes for therapy, and 15 minutes to educate the patient on the types of exercise techniques they can perform at home.

²The term 'chief complaint' describes the primary symptom(s) that a patient states as their reason for seeking treatment.

What are the main differences between chiropractic, osteopathic, and physiotherapeutic care?

On the surface, it can seem like practitioners of chiropractic, osteopathic, and physiotherapeutic care all do the same type of thing: non-invasive treatment, hands-on techniques, all with the aim to improve the health of patients. There are, however, a number of key differences between these three types of chronic pain care providers.

Here, we take a look at how each of the three treatments differ:

Chiropractic care

With this type of treatment, the practitioner (called a chiropractor) primarily focuses on manipulating the [spine](#) with their hands or small instruments. While a wide diversity of ideas prevail among the chiropractic community, all practitioners share the common belief that the spine and body's overall health are deeply connected through the nervous system.

Based on this premise, a misaligned spinal disc/joint impairs nervous system function - especially the sensory neurons - and thus leads to pain.

Chiropractic treatment can help to promote a patient's ability to heal naturally through conservative management of their neuromusculoskeletal system without taking medications or undergoing surgery. To date, this form of care remains popular in relieving chronic pain symptoms, thus helping patients avoid invasive surgeries.

A 7-year study showed that patients whose primary physician was a chiropractor experienced the following results:

60%	Fewer hospital admissions
59%	Fewer days in hospital
62%	Fewer outpatient surgeries
85%	Lower pharmaceutical costs

What can I expect from chiropractic treatment?

When receiving a chiropractic adjustment, the physician will find sections of the patient's spine that are in a compromised state. They will then manipulate these specific sections of the spine in such a way that, in most cases, it will cause a cracking/popping noise. These adjustments help to restore the structure of the spine to its natural state, allowing the nervous system to flow freely, hence removing/reducing pain. Further to this, in many cases chiropractors can even detect early misalignments of the spine to help the patient avoid future complications.

Sometimes, a chiropractor might prescribe radiological image exams (i.e. an X-Ray, CT scan, or MRI, etc.) to diagnose the reason(s) for certain abnormalities or check/compare the bone structure of the patient. More specifically:

- X-rays can detect narrowed disc space, bone spurs, or rule out fractures
- MRIs and CT scans can reveal bulging discs and herniations
- An EMG (electromyography) can detect nerve damage

Chiropractic treatments may also involve the use of special tools such as “activators”, which are hand-held instruments that deliver controlled and reproducible impulses to adjust the spine. Such instruments provide quick thrust movements with a lower force than hands-on manipulation. The advantage to this is that activators don't cause the typical cracking sound, which can cause distress to certain patients.





Osteopathic care

Osteopathic patients are **typically** those experiencing joint, back, or neck pain, as well as work- and sports-related injuries. Like chiropractors, osteopaths also aim to naturally and non-invasively heal pain/discomfort, but the treatment is not primarily focused on the spine. Instead, osteopaths focus on promoting the health of the entire **musculoskeletal system**³.

What can I expect from osteopathic treatment?

When treating patients with chronic pain, osteopaths work to reduce pain through manipulation of muscle tissue, joints, and bones. Osteopathic physicians do not only concentrate on the site where the problem is located, but use manual⁴ techniques to **balance body systems**, and boost overall health and wellbeing. Typically speaking, the techniques osteopaths apply are gentler than chiropractic treatment techniques - they don't tend to employ the same spinal manipulation technique that causes the infamous chiropractic "cracking sound".

Osteopaths are also trained in cranial osteopathy, which means they also aim to treat structures inside the head. Cranial osteopathic techniques focus on lightly touching the skull to gently manipulate blood flow surrounding the brain. It can also be applied to any part of the body (not just the head), and can be performed on children and babies.

Physiotherapeutic care

The main aim of physiotherapy is to improve the patient's ability to move and function, repair damage, and reduce stiffness and aches. Unlike chiropractors and osteopaths, physiotherapists mainly focus on treating **soft tissue** like muscle, ligaments, and muscle trigger points (a.k.a. pain points). It is also widely used to assist in post-stroke rehabilitation, and to treat Parkinson's disease, arthritis, and other conditions that can limit mobility. Physiotherapy is usually medically prescribed to patients post- injury/ surgery to help bring their bodies back to a natural state of mobility.

What can I expect from physiotherapeutic treatment?

Along with manual therapy (e.g. massage treatment), some physiotherapists also complement treatment with physical and electrophysical agents (e.g. electrical devices that stimulate certain muscle areas to promote faster recovery). After your physiotherapy session has ended, your therapist may recommend several easy-to-follow exercises to perform at home.

³The **musculoskeletal system** comprises of the skeleton, muscles, cartilage, ligaments, joints, and other connective tissue that supports and binds organs together.

⁴Manual medicine refers to diagnosis and treatment carried out with a person's hands.

Should I visit a chiropractor, osteopath, or physiotherapist?

After reading the above similarities and differences between chiropractic, osteopathic, and physiotherapeutic care, you likely now have a better understanding of which one will be best suited to you. The first priority, then, is to seek advice from a qualified medical practitioner. If you're unsure, it's important that you consult with your doctor so they can examine your condition - and recommend/refer you to the right practitioner.



Preparing for your appointment

When visiting a chiropractor, osteopath, or physiotherapist for the first time, you might not know what to expect. To make the best use of your appointment, we advise wearing loose clothing (e.g. loose T-shirt) to allow for easy movement of the body. These sessions often involve the practitioner teaching patients exercise techniques. Stretching and getting into multiple positions may be required.



Chronic pain care provider facilities in Beijing and Shanghai

Most international facilities in China will offer one or all of the aforementioned chronic pain treatments. We've listed below the most popular international facilities for chiropractic, osteopathic, and/or physiotherapeutic care in Beijing and Shanghai.

Popular facilities for chiropractic, osteopathic, and physiotherapeutic care in Beijing:

- Oasis International Hospital
- Beijing Vista Clinic
- ParkwayHealth
- Raffles Medical Beijing
- Beijing United Family Hospital

Popular facilities for chiropractic, osteopathic, and physiotherapeutic care in Shanghai:

- Jiahui Health
- SinoUnited Health
- Body & Soul
- St. Michael Hospital
- The Clinic
- ParkwayHealth
- Shanghai United Family Hospital
- Shanghai Yosemite Clinic



Cost and insurance

Prices vary from facility to facility, but on average you can expect the cost of one 30 to 45 minute session to range from [RMB 1,200](#) to [RMB 1,600](#) in both Beijing and Shanghai. It's worth bearing in mind here that, should you require radiological image exams (e.g. an X-ray), the cost of your appointment can easily increase by more than double. Therefore it is a good idea to check that your health insurance plan covers such treatments.

Typically speaking, if your health insurance plan covers outpatient treatment (i.e. care that does not require an overnight hospital stay), it should cover chiropractic, osteopathic, and physiotherapeutic consultations. Plans and benefits can vary between insurers though, so please do check your table of benefits carefully, as many policies impose specific limits/restrictions (e.g. a limited number of consultations your plan will cover each year) on these types of treatments.

It is also important to bear in mind here that you must seek care from a legally registered medical facility for an insurer to cover these types of treatments. In particular, certain specialist clinics may have internationally certified physicians, but the facilities themselves might not actually be registered in China and, as such, the insurer may use this as grounds to reject claims for care sought at these facilities.

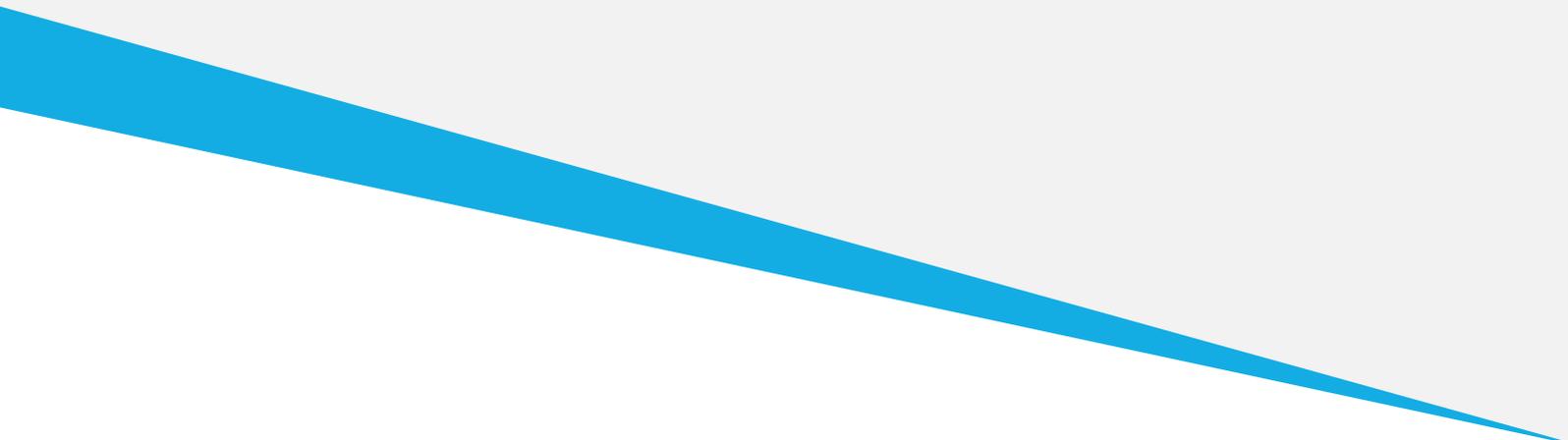
Last but not least, we strongly advise checking with your broker to ascertain your health insurance plan's exact terms and coverage conditions as it pertains to benefits and facility licensing in order to avoid any unnecessary out of pocket costs.

Using Pacific Prime China to your **advantage**

As you can tell from the above, there's a whole host of things that should be considered when choosing a chronic pain care provider and ascertaining health insurance policy benefits in China. If you have any questions concerning your current health plan, feel free to give our advisors a call today.

As China's leading insurance broker, our advisors operate out of both Shanghai and Beijing, and have years of experience matching expats and locals with the best plans for their healthcare needs and budget. We're also a full-service broker, with dedicated in-house support teams that help our clients with inquiries, renewals, claims, insurer negotiations, and more; all at zero cost to them.

Contact us today for a free quote and answers to all your questions, or check out our Health Insurance Guides page to discover our range of free-to-download resources.



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