# Case management in primary care among frequent users of healthcare services with chronic conditions: protocol of a realist synthesis

MC Chouinard, K Aubrey-Bassler, N Muhajarine, F Burge, P Pluye, P L Bush, V R Ramsden, F Légaré, L Guénette, P Morin, M Lambert, F Fick, O Cleary, A Groulx, M Couture, C Campbell, M Baker, L Edwards, V Sabourin, C Spence, M Warren, J Godbout, B Davis, N Rabbitskin, C Hudon

## BACKGROUND

- Frequent users of healthcare services account for a small proportion of the patient population, but use over half the healthcare and social services available.

- > 80% of frequent users of emergency department suffer from chronic conditions that should be cared for in primary ambulatory care.

- Case management (CM) is the most promising intervention for frequent users, but no full theoretical explanation of successful conditions is known.

## OBJECTIVE

- To develop a middle range theory that explains how CM in primary care works to improve outcomes among frequent users with chronic conditions, for what types of frequent users and in what circumstances.

- Research questions:

1) What mechanisms contribute, among frequent users, to the desired effects (i.e. integration of care, health care use and cost, self-management, experience of care and quality of life) of CM in primary care?

2) Which frequent users should CM target?

3) What contexts and circumstances of CM generate these mechanisms?

## METHODS

Realist synthesis will be conducted to explore the causal mechanisms that underlie CM, and how contextual factors influence the link between these causal mechanisms and outcomes by following five phases:

**Phase 1**
**Focusing the scope of the realist synthesis**

- One-day virtual meeting
- Initial rough program theory building

**Phase 2**
**Searching for the evidence**

- Cluster searching to identify evidence from the CM studies included from our previous systematic review

**Phase 3**
**Appraising the quality of evidence**

- Examination of relevance and rigor of the various sources of evidence

**Phase 4**
**Extracting the data**

- Recording of relevant information for selected sources of evidence
- Backwards and outwards coding of information about CMO

**Phase 5**
**Synthesizing the data**

- Examination of patterns in CMO configurations
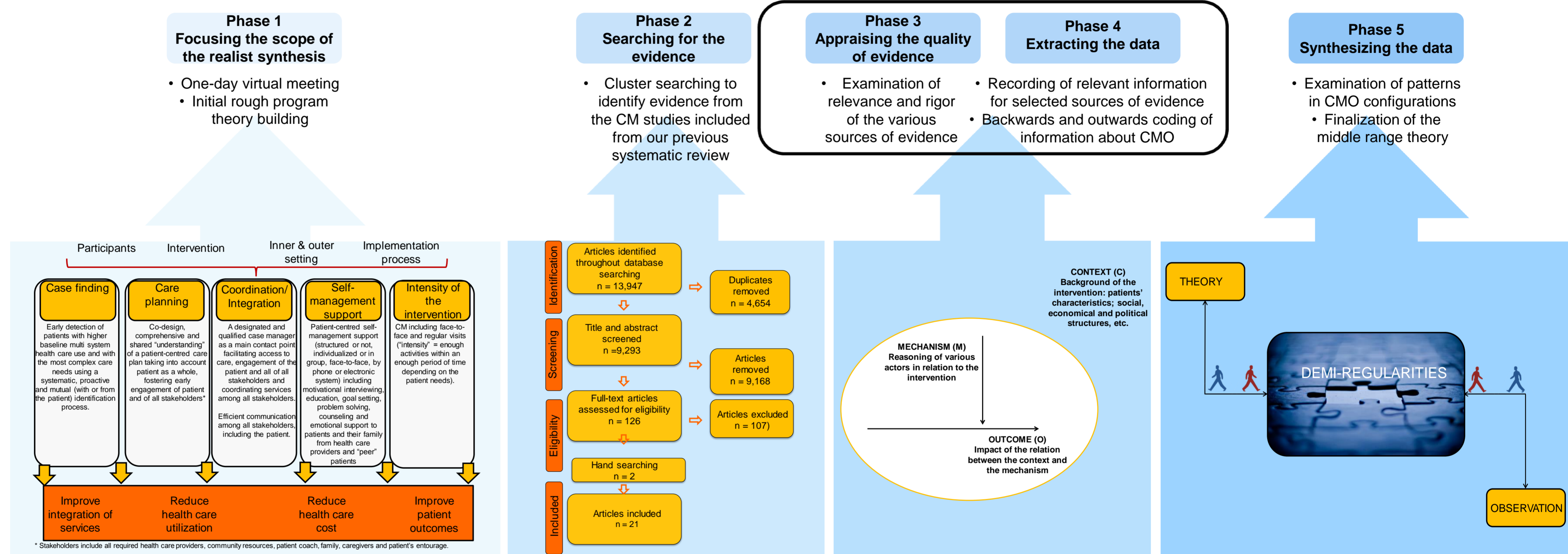- Finalization of the middle range theory



Figure 1. Initial rough theory developed by members of the team (decision-makers, practitioners, patients, academic researchers and research assistants)



Figure 2. Systematic review flowchart of search results



Figure 3. CMO's configuration adapted from Pawson and Tilley



Figure 4. Abductive reasoning adapted from Robert and Ridde

## ANTICIPATED RESULTS

- A theory explaining how CM in primary care works to improve outcomes among frequent users with chronic conditions will be developed, supported by CMO configurations.
- This theory will be applicable in various primary care contexts and for various frequent users.
- Given the involvement of knowledge users, such as decision-makers, practitioners, and patients, the theory will be relevant and likely used.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*References can be provided upon request

**For information :**
maud-christine_chouinard@uqac.ca
catherine.hudon@usherbrooke.ca