



Amputation prevention: Increased supports needed to treat diabetic foot ulcers in Ontario

Issue: The Canadian Diabetes Association is calling for public coverage to increase timely access to medical devices that help treat diabetic foot ulcers and reduce the risk of amputation in Ontario.

Every four hours in Ontario, someone has a lower limb amputated due to a diabetic foot ulcer.

- Diabetic foot ulcers are serious wounds that are common, debilitating and the most feared consequence of diabetes. They are also the leading cause of all non-traumatic amputations below the knee in Canada.
- Of the 1.5 million people with diabetes in Ontario, between 16,600 and 27,600 are expected to have a diabetic foot ulcer in one year alone.
- Each year, close to 2,000 Ontarians with diabetes have a lower-limb amputation, and those amputations are associated with 800 premature deaths.

Most of these amputations can be prevented if foot ulcers are properly treated.

- When a diabetic foot ulcer heals properly, a person spends approximately five days in the hospital, ER and clinics.¹
- With lower limb amputations, a person spends approximately 86 days in the hospital, ER and clinics—dramatically increasing the burden on people with diabetes and our health-care system.
- Offloading devices are specialized products, such as air casts or orthoses, that relieve pressure on foot ulcers to help them heal and reduce the risk of amputation—but they are expensive. An offloading device can cost up to \$2,500.

The Government of Ontario could save a net estimate of \$48-75 million a year in health-care costs.

- Diabetic foot ulcers directly cost Ontario's health-care system an estimated \$320-400 million a year.
- The cost to provide offloading devices plus orthotist visits would be \$20-34 million a year.
- With public funding, the direct costs related to diabetic foot ulcers would fall by an estimated \$82-96 million a year, creating a net savings of \$48-75 million annually.

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There are limited supports for wound care and amputation prevention.

- There is limited public funding for foot care services and specialty supports in Ontario. For example, the provincial government currently provides funding for about 150 health-care professionals that provide foot and wound care services.
- The lack of universal coverage makes these supports challenging to access, especially for people with low incomes or who live in rural or remote areas.
- Currently, Health Quality Ontario is developing draft wound care quality standards, which will be posted for public comment on December 8, 2016. Draft recommendations for total contact casting and the removable cast walker are aimed to be presented to the Ontario Health Technology Advisory Committee on January 27, 2017.

Preventing diabetic foot ulcers and amputations.

- Improved diabetes foot care and amputation prevention is a key priority for the Canadian Diabetes Association. Our full set of recommendations for improved diabetes foot care includes:²
 1. Affordable and timely access to the medications, devices, education and care that are necessary for achieving optimal diabetes control and preventing serious complications such as amputation.
 2. Access to publicly funded services and devices for all people with diabetes to prevent and treat foot ulcers and avoid amputation, including foot care education, professionally fitted footwear and devices, timely referrals and visits to a foot care specialist.
 3. Help preventing and managing foot complications by coordinating care and communication between health-care professionals who support people with diabetes.
 4. Health-care professionals to screen for diabetic nerve damage (neuropathy) and disease of blood vessels outside the heart and brain (peripheral vascular disease), perform annual examinations for foot complications (more frequent for those at high risk) and educate people with diabetes about proper foot care as an integral component of diabetes management (as outlined in the *Canadian Diabetes Association 2013 Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Diabetes in Canada*).
 5. People with diabetes to check their feet daily for cuts, cracks, bruises, blisters, sores, infection and unusual markings, and have regular conversations with their health-care providers about caring for their feet.

¹ Canadian Diabetes Association and the Centre for Spatial Economics. "Impact of Offloading Devices on the Cost of Diabetic Foot Ulcers in Ontario." 2015. Available from <http://www.diabetes.ca/publications-newsletters/advocacy-reports/impact-of-offloading-devices>

² Canadian Diabetes Association. 2015 Report on Diabetes: Driving Change. Toronto, ON: CDA; 2015. Available from <https://www.diabetes.ca/getmedia/5a7070f0-77ad-41ad-9e95-ec1bc56ebf85/2015-report-on-diabetes-driving-change-english.pdf.aspx>

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