

Coverage of Glucose Monitoring Devices



Background

Glucose monitoring gives people living with diabetes a more complete picture of their blood sugar levels, which can influence short- and long-term treatment decisions and improve health outcomes. It allows people living with diabetes and their health-care providers to assess glycemic status and adverse effects, and to determine the effectiveness of glucose-lowering therapies.

Glucose monitoring has the potential to improve blood sugar management and quality of life for people living with diabetes, resulting in physical, social, emotional, and functional benefits. There are 3 main types of glucose monitoring: (1) capillary blood glucose monitoring (CBG), (2) real-time continuous glucose monitoring (rtCGM), and (3) intermittently-scanned continuous glucose monitoring (isCGM).

CBG uses a drop of blood from a finger prick to get a blood glucose reading using a blood glucose meter or glucometer. Most glucometers are free of charge and easy to obtain in the community from your diabetes education team or centre, from a pharmacy with the purchase of test strips, or directly from the company. They are typically not covered under public plans. The cost of some specialty glucometers may be reimbursed through private insurance plans.

An rtCGM system includes a small disposable glucose sensor with a filament inserted under the skin, often on the person's stomach or arm. The sensor tests glucose levels every few minutes and sends this information to an attached transmitter and, generally, to a separate receiving device, such as a smartphone or external reader. The readings can then be viewed by the patient, caregiver, or health-care provider, even remotely.

An isCGM system includes a small disposable glucose sensor with a filament inserted under the skin of a person's upper arm. When the sensor is scanned with a separate receiving device, such as a smartphone or external reader, it transmits the glucose reading and information on the most recent 8-hour trend to the reader/app. If the person with diabetes performs at least 3 sensor scans per day, at approximately 8-hour intervals, the isCGM can record 24-hour glucose profiles.

Different devices are indicated for different people, and Diabetes Canada's recommendations on device use can help guide a person's decision-making process (1,2). Choosing the right device is a personal decision, based on discussions between the person living with diabetes, their caregivers, and their diabetes health-care team.

Challenges

While coverage of glucose monitoring devices is included in many private insurance plans, public coverage is inconsistent across Canada. The high cost of glucose monitoring devices is a barrier to access for many Canadians living with diabetes, which carry an annual price tag of \$3,500 to \$6,000 for rtCGM and \$2,000 to \$3,000 for isCGM.* Many obstacles, including administrative red tape, impede people's ability to fully access this coverage. Depending on the province or territory, coverage may be restricted by age. Across Canada, rtCGM is not covered by the governments of Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. The isCGM is not covered by the governments of Nunavut, Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.

Policy Implications

Canadians living in provinces and territories with no coverage, with limited coverage, or not meeting eligibility criteria for their provincial/territorial plan must pay out-of-pocket for glucose monitoring devices. For many people, this cost is prohibitive. Restricted access means a lost opportunity for people with diabetes to enhance their glucose management and diabetes-specific quality of life and treatment satisfaction.

Recommendations

Diabetes Canada recommends provincial and territorial governments **eliminate discrimination based on age and other financial and administrative barriers** to access glucose monitoring programs and **provide coverage for glucose monitoring devices per Diabetes Canada's recommendations** (2). Coverage for glucose monitoring supplies must include all products needed to use their monitoring device properly and effectively.[§] Where governments choose to use co-pays and/or means testing, the test criteria must be set at a level that ensures that the cost of caring for diabetes is not a barrier or a burden to the individual. People living with diabetes across Canada

*The annual costs of rtCGM and isCGM are presented as ranges to account for the price variability between and within the manufacturers' offerings. Cost borne by provinces and territories would depend on the terms of the coverage and the price the province/territory negotiates with the manufacturer.

[§]Products needed may include antiseptic, adhesive, and protective barrier.

should also have access to the education and supports they require that allow them to effectively self-manage their disease. People living with diabetes across Canada should also have access to the education and support they require that allows them to effectively self-manage their disease with glucose monitoring devices to its full capacity.

References

- Cheng AYY, Feig DS, Ho J, Siemens R. [Blood Glucose Monitoring in Adults and Children with Diabetes: Update 2021](#). Can J Diabetes. 2021;45(7):580-587.
- [Reimbursement of Intermittently-Scanned and Real-Time Continuous Glucose Monitoring Systems: A Policy Statement](#). Ottawa: Diabetes Canada; 2021.

Coverage of Glucose Monitoring Devices Across Canada

| Province/Territory | Real-Time Continuous Glucose Monitor (rtCGM) | Intermittently-Scanned Continuous Glucose Monitor (isCGM) |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Yukon | Full coverage for all living with type 1 diabetes (Dexcom G6, Medtronic Guardian Connect or Link). | Full coverage for adults aged 18 and up living with type 1 diabetes (FreeStyle Libre), and full coverage for children and adults aged 2 and up living with type 1 diabetes (FreeStyle Libre 2). |
| Nunavut | No coverage | No coverage |
| Northwest Territories | No coverage | No coverage |
| British Columbia | Coverage as per the rules of BC PharmaCare for Dexcom G6 for ages 2 and older with diabetes requiring MDI or insulin pump and meet criteria. | No coverage |
| Alberta | No coverage | No coverage |
| Saskatchewan | Full coverage for children and youth under age 18 and meet criteria (Dexcom G6, Medtronic Guardian Connect or Link). | Full coverage for children and youth under age 18 and meet criteria (Libre 2). |
| Manitoba | Coverage as per rules of MB PharmaCare for ages 25 and under and meet criteria (Dexcom G6, Medtronic Guardian Connect or Link). | Coverage as per rules of MB PharmaCare for ages 25 and under and meet criteria (Libre 2). |
| Ontario | Full coverage by the ODSP for eligible ODSP clients living with diabetes. | Coverage for the Freestyle Libre reader and 33 sensors per year for ODB clients who manage their diabetes with insulin. |
| Québec | Ages 2 and up with type 1 diabetes: full coverage of Dexcom G6 for residents who meet criteria. | Full coverage for the FreeStyle Libre sensors for residents 18 years or older who manage diabetes with insulin and meet the specific eligibility criteria. |
| Newfoundland & Labrador | No coverage | No coverage |
| New Brunswick | No coverage | No coverage |
| Nova Scotia | No coverage | No coverage |
| Prince Edward Island | No coverage | No coverage |
| NIHB | Full coverage of Dexcom G6 for ages 2 to 19 on intensive insulin therapy. Others covered on a case-by-case basis. | Covered on a case-by-case basis. |

NOTES: Where formal programs exist, links are provided.

Abbreviations: NIHB: non-insured health benefits; ODB: Ontario Drug Benefit; ODSP: Ontario Disability Support Program; RAMQ: Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec (RAMQ).