

# Using Wounds Canada's Pathway for Preventing and Managing Diabetic Foot Complications to guide decision-making



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Without adequate — and common — knowledge and guidance on the part of patients, healthcare professionals and health-policy decision makers, Canadian healthcare systems are unable to adequately protect patients with diabetes from preventable foot ulceration and amputations. In Canada, emphasis tends to be on treatment rather than prevention and early intervention, which means many complications that could be prevented are not. To address this problem, Wounds Canada and the Canadian Diabetic Foot Task Force created the Pathway for Preventing and Managing Diabetic Foot Complications. This document outlines the key components of preventative care and wound management. These concepts are presented in a way that is easy to read and understand for all Canadians, regardless of their healthcare background. This tool is also helpful in Wounds Canada's advocacy work, as it provides a framework to which provincial and territorial governments can align their policies toward improvements that can be seen in patient quality of life, as well as financial savings for the healthcare systems.

**D**iabetes-related foot complications, such as foot ulcers and amputations, are leading causes of morbidity in patients with diabetes. While many of these complications are preventable and manageable when detected promptly, early identification of risk and intervention are not nearly as prevalent in Canada as they should be, resulting in an unacceptable rate of ulceration and amputation.

The reasons for this fall into a number of areas. Many patients with diabetes lack the awareness and education to recognise the importance of daily foot care, what to look for and how to act when problems occur. Often, minor foot trauma is not considered serious enough to warrant clinician concern and treatment and, due to neuropathy, can quickly turn into a major event. Canadian healthcare systems are not organised in such a way that they can support prevention. Policymakers in the area of diabetic foot care often lack knowledge of how identification of risk and early intervention can save lives and financial resources.

A more co-ordinated effort to increase awareness among patients with diabetes and

clinicians, and to implement appropriate policies and funding to support prevention through risk assessment and early intervention would result in saving thousands of limbs and lives, not to mention millions of dollars in direct and indirect costs.

### Pathway for preventing and managing diabetic foot complications

Wounds Canada's Pathway for Preventing and Managing Diabetic Foot Complications [Figure 1] was created through a collaboration of the Canadian Diabetic Foot Task Force and Wounds Canada's National Strategy Committee and staff. The infographic outlines key components of care and presents them in a way that is understandable to all Canadians, whether or not they have a background in health care. Recommendations for risk assessment, plan of care and re-screening, re-assessment and evaluation of the intervention are provided, as is information about which care settings are typically involved in each aspect of care.

### Other tools from Wounds Canada

In addition to the infographic, Wounds Canada has

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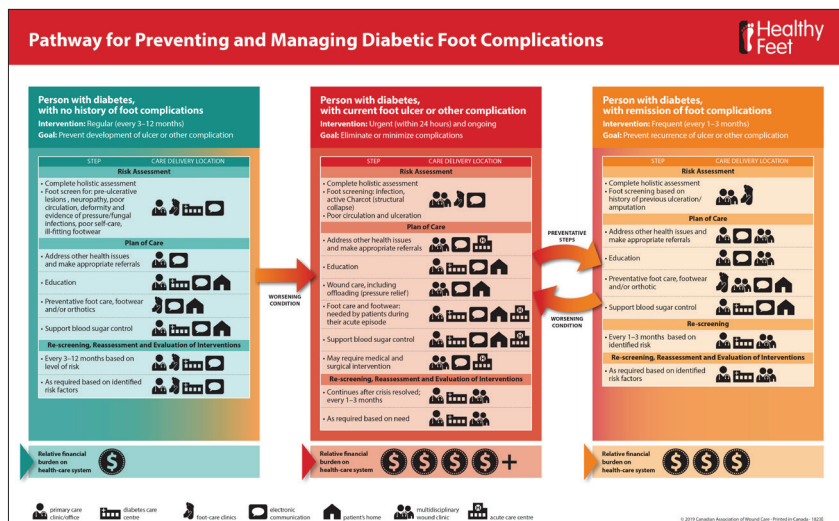


Figure 1. Pathway for Preventing and Managing Diabetic Foot Complications. The Pathway can be accessed at: <https://www.woundscanada.ca/docman/public/limb-preservation-in-canada/2019-vol-1-no-1/1531-lpc-summer-2019-v1n1-final-p-55-61-df-infographic/file>.

developed a number of key resources for those with or at risk for diabetic foot complications, frontline clinicians and decision makers. These are free, downloadable resources and include Best Practice Recommendation documents, a diabetic foot screening tool, patient and clinician handouts/posters on diabetic foot prevention and care, Product Pickers, a patient self-management programme specific to diabetes and foot care (Diabetes, Healthy Feet and You), our flagship publication, *Wound Care Canada*, a new journal called *Limb Preservation in Canada* and multiple educational programmes for healthcare providers through our Wounds Canada Institute.

### Advocating for patients

Wounds Canada communicates with health ministries around the country to advocate for best-practice-based foot care for patients with diabetes. Recommendations to governments health systems align with the Pathway for Preventing and Managing Diabetic Foot Complications. These recommendations state that all persons with diabetes receive:

- Affordable and timely access to the medications, devices, education and care necessary for achieving optimal diabetes control and preventing serious complications, such as amputation
- Access to publicly funded services and devices to prevent and treat foot ulcers and avoid amputation, including preventative foot care, risk assessment, foot care education, professionally fitted footwear and devices, and timely referrals to multidisciplinary teams and that all health regions/agencies:
- Prevent and manage foot complications by providing a well-defined referral pattern, and by co-ordinating care and communication between clinicians who support people with diabetes as

part of a multidisciplinary team

- Publish, on an annual basis, reliable data on diabetes-related foot care, using internationally recognised metrics, to assist ongoing quality improvement efforts.

### Case study: the pathway in action in Ontario

On November 20, 2019, Wounds Canada held a reception for ministers and staff of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase awareness of the burden of wounds in the province. Wounds Canada board members and staff gave attendees a presentation about the burden of wounds and the high human and financial costs of poorly managed wounds and lack of a preventative approach. Using diabetic foot ulcers as a focus, Wounds Canada used the Pathway for the Prevention and Management of Diabetic Foot Complications to illustrate the gaps that exist in care and presented ways for these gaps to be addressed. Wounds Canada advocated that the government of Ontario prioritise wound care, ensuring that patient care is equitable, timely, non-fragmented and accessible across the province.

Specific recommendations and key actions to improve patient care included:

- Developing policies that prevent wounds such as pressure injuries and infected wounds in acute and home care settings
- Increasing wound-related education for healthcare providers, patients and families
- Ensuring the province's interprofessional teams include wound experts
- Implementing wound care pathways from hospitals to home and community care with set measurables, monitoring and evaluation
- Providing access to evidence-based products and technology that improve patient outcomes.

The Pathway provided a means to communicate in a visually striking way not only the potentially vast improvement in patient quality of life, but also the significant savings in healthcare dollars possible by implementing such policies.

### Future steps

Wounds Canada sees the Pathway as one small part of a larger ongoing advocacy and education effort that will increase awareness of the burden of wounds in Canada and lead to meaningful changes that result in better patient outcomes. These important documents will be disseminated to clinicians, patients, care partners and policy makers through social media, newsletters, collaboration with partnering associations and industry partners, Wound Care Canada magazine and as a part of our larger government relations strategy.