



Wounds Canada

Submission to the

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

Government of Ontario

August 27, 2020

Recommendations:

Wound care costs Ontario approximately \$1.5 billion annually in direct costs, even though many wounds, such as pressure injuries (bed sores) and diabetic foot ulcers, along with surgical wound complications are largely preventable.

Wounds of many types often have a significant impact on Canadians' quality of life and their ability to participate fully in their communities and the economy.

Wounds Canada recommends that the Government of Ontario:

1. Work with the provinces, territories and Government of Canada to develop national wound care standards.
2. Prioritize wound prevention and care, ensuring that patient care is equitable, timely, non-fragmented and accessible across jurisdictions. To improve patient care, reduce hospitalizations and lower spending on wounds, key actions must include:
 - Developing policies that prevent wounds such as pressure injuries (bed sores), diabetic foot ulcers and infected wounds in acute and home care settings
 - Providing access to wound care products and technology that are evidence-based and improve patient outcomes
 - Increasing wound-related education and information for health-care providers, patients and families
 - Ensuring that interprofessional teams include wound experts



- Implementing wound prevention and management pathways in all settings—from hospitals to home and community care—with set measurables, monitoring and evaluation
3. Ensure that wound prevention, management and education become part of any changes to the long-term care system in Ontario, given the numerous references (31) to inadequate wound care noted in the Canadian Armed Forces' report on five long-term care homes in the province.

About Wounds Canada

Established in 1995, Wounds Canada is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of wound prevention and care in Canada. Wounds Canada is dedicated to a collaborative, integrated approach to wound prevention and management to improve the health of Canadians. Our association focuses our efforts in four key areas:

1. Public advocacy, awareness and education
2. Professional education
3. Research
4. Partnerships that support Wounds Canada's goals of improving patient outcomes

Preface

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed unprecedented pressure on health-care systems across our country. Canadians have risen admirably to the challenge of containing the spread of COVID-19, and governments have stepped up to aide citizens and businesses during a time of economic struggle.

Wounds Canada greatly appreciates the steps taken to date by the Government of Ontario and other levels of government to keep our communities safe and to help businesses and non-profits. With this assistance, our organization has been able to quickly adapt to the new reality of this pandemic and has embraced virtual tools to manage and deliver our services. However, 80% of our revenues previously came from in-person events, such as educational programming and our live conferences.

Without continued assistance from the Government of Ontario and other levels of government, many non-profits such as Wounds Canada may not survive. As a national organization, we provide essential educational programming and services for our communities that are not available elsewhere.

COVID-19 has exposed or brought greater attention to the cracks within our health-care systems. For example, the Canadian military reports demonstrated the extent to which even basic best-practice-based wound care is not delivered in long-term care homes. Wounds Canada is also working on research that shows COVID-19 added pressure to already inadequate wound care, resulting in an increase in wound complications such as stalled healing, infected wounds and wound-related amputations. In the coming months, our organization will release this information in a peer-reviewed article.

As noted above, wounds – such as diabetic foot ulcers, surgical wounds with complications and pressure injuries (e.g. bed sores) – often have a significant impact on Canadians’ quality of life and their ability to participate fully in their communities and the economy.

Wounds Canada is a small organization that, despite its size, over 25 years has made a large impact in wound prevention and management across the country. However, alone we cannot fix the problems of wound care. Canada needs all levels of government to make wound care a priority, which is why we are calling on the Government of Ontario to implement the recommendations outlined above and expanded upon in the next section.

PRIORITIZE WOUND CARE TO REDUCE HOSPITALIZATIONS AND HEALTH-CARE COSTS

Wound care costs Ontario at least \$1.5 billion annually in direct costsⁱ

RECOMMENDATION 1: Wounds Canada urges the Government of Ontario to work with the provinces, the territories and the Government of Canada to develop national wound care standards.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Wounds Canada urges the Government of Ontario to prioritize wound prevention and care, ensuring that patient care is equitable, timely, non-fragmented and accessible across jurisdictions.

To improve patient care, reduce hospitalizations and lower spending on wounds, key actions must include:

- Developing policies that prevent wounds such as pressure injuries (bed sores), diabetic foot ulcers and infected wounds in acute and home care settings
- Providing access to wound care products and technology that are evidence-based and improve patient outcomes
- Increasing wound-related education and information for health-care providers, patients and families
- Ensuring that interprofessional teams include wound experts
- Implementing wound prevention and management pathways in all settings—from hospitals to home and community care—with set measurables, monitoring and evaluation

RECOMMENDATION 3: Wounds Canada urges the Government of Ontario to ensure that wound prevention, management and education become part of any changes to the long-term care system.

Implementing these key actions would improve patient outcomes and reduce spending on wounds.

- Every day, people are admitted to hospitals for infected wounds and are dying from pressure-related injuries (bed sores). Excluding Quebec, over 5,000 amputations happen annually across Canada due to diabetic foot ulcers, with 2,000 in Ontario. New research shows this number is rising.
- In Ontario evidence-based wound care is not integrated and equitably accessible to patients. For example, interprofessional teams often do not have access to basic wound care products such as advanced dressings. Health-care professionals do not have access to standard-of-care technology and practices that could detect and prevent pressure injuries from developing. Many frontline clinicians, including doctors and nurses, have little training in wound prevention and management.
- With investment in better wound prevention and management earlier on in the patient journey, the Government of Ontario could improve patient outcomes, reduce hospitalizations and readmissions, and quickly cut health-care costs related to wounds.
 - For example, **adoption of best practices could reduce wound costs in home care by 40–50%.**ⁱⁱ
Approximately 50% of home care visits involve wound care.

A person's hospitalization and home care needs increase with complex or severe wounds.

- A person with a diabetic foot ulcer that heals as expected spends an average of 5 days in the hospital, emergency rooms and clinics, whereas a diabetic foot ulcer that results in an amputation increases this time to an average of 70 days.ⁱⁱⁱ
- A surgical wound that becomes infected increases a person's hospitalization by 11 days in Canada.

- Despite the fact that at least 70% of all pressure injuries are preventable, 25% of people in any care setting have a pressure injury on any given day. Pressure injuries can extend a hospital stay by 4 to 11 days.^{iv}

Wound care has not been prioritized across Canada. We can do better.

- The Government of Alberta has implemented a diabetic foot care pathway and reduced their amputation rate. The Government of Ontario has taken initial steps: draft wound care pathways are currently being developed, and funding for offloading devices has been provided to help prevent amputations due to diabetic foot ulcers. **However, more must be done.**
- Wound care pathways, education and other supports are standard in many nations such as the United Kingdom, Spain, Netherlands and Sweden. Yet Canada, including Ontario, has fallen far behind its peers by not keeping up with advances in standard-of-care technology and implementing best practices.
- Ontario needs better wound care policies and pathways that
 - support best practice and ensure appropriate and cost-effective outcomes
 - provide access to wound experts
 - provide basic education for patients and health-care professionals (from nurses and family physicians to surgeons and chiropractors)
 - ensure access to evidence-based technology and products

For more information, please contact Amanda Thambirajah, Director of Government Relations and Public Affairs at Wounds Canada, at: amanda.thambirajah@woundscanada.ca

ⁱ CIHI National Health Expenditure Trends, 1975 to 2011.

ⁱⁱ Ontario Wound Care Interest Group. "Fewer Wounds, Faster Healing: Framework for an Ontario Wound Care Strategy. October 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ Diabetes Canada and the Centre for Spatial Economics. "The Economic Impact of Offloading Devices for the Prevention of Amputations in Ontario." 2015.

^{iv} Leaf Healthcare Inc, "The Financial Impact of Pressure Ulcers." 2016.