

# About Wounds

## A primer for the non-clinician

### What is a wound?

A wound is a break in skin integrity due to assault from the outside (trauma) or internal changes that cause skin breakdown (disease).

**Minor wounds:** Small cuts, scrapes, blisters, and shallow burns over a small area, shallow pressure, shear and friction (abrasion) injuries

**Major wounds:** Deep cuts, deep and/or extensive burns, surgical incisions, deep pressure ulcers, penetrating wounds, any significant break in the skin that includes other tissues or covers an extensive body area

### Wound Healing

In healthy individuals, most wounds heal on their own with minimal intervention. The healing may take time, depending on the seriousness of the wound, but healing continues until closure is achieved.

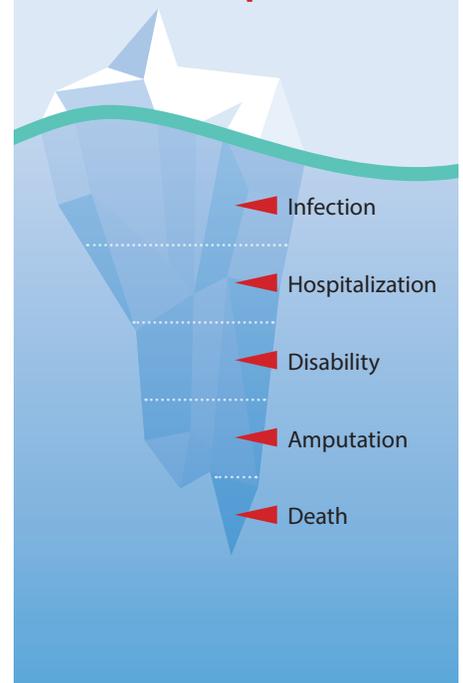
For people with conditions such as diabetes, poor blood flow in the legs, neurological or sensory deficits, musculoskeletal conditions, or other conditions that affect bodily systems, **even minor wounds can become a problem, and major wounds put patients at high risk for complications (such as infection and amputation)**. In these individuals, wound healing can be slow, stall or stop completely. Wounds can become worse. These wounds can sometimes be present for years if left untreated or if treated improperly. Patients with non-healing wounds often end up in hospital, sometimes for long periods or repeatedly.



### The Impact of Wounds

Major wounds and wounds that don't heal in a timely way or that become complicated are a significant burden to Canada's health-care systems in terms of financial resources, human resources and space in hospital, rehab and home care. For patients, they can lead to significantly altered lifestyle, loss of function, loss of employment, additional illness, amputation and even death. Families, friends and work colleagues are affected too.

### Wounds in Canada: The Hidden Epidemic



### The Bottom Line

Giving higher priority to wound prevention and treatment—and supporting them through changes in policy, education and practice—will reduce wasted health-care dollars and create a healthier Canadian society.