

**2021 Ontario Budget Consultations
Submission to the Ministry of Finance
Government of Ontario
February 12, 2021**

Prioritizing Wound Care in Ontario:

Providing Access to Innovation in Wound Care Education

RECOMMENDATION: Wounds Canada and the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario are recommending the Government of Ontario help address the rising incidence of acute and hard-to-heal wounds by investing \$1.6 million over three years in the Wound Care Champions Program to provide 200 regulated health-care professionals and 200 unregulated care providers equitable access to comprehensive, competency-based, skin health and wound education.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in Ontario, health-care professionals have noted a rapid rise in acute and hard-to-heal wounds across all health-care settings. The Canadian Armed Forces' report on long-term care homes in Ontario reported multiple instances of severe pressure injuries and residents experiencing excruciatingly painful wounds (Canadian Armed Forces, 2020). These are wounds that also contribute to deaths in long-term care homes.

Pre-pandemic, \$1.5 billion was the conservative estimate of the direct cost of wound care in Ontario. The pervasiveness and high costs of acute and hard-to-heal wounds (such as surgical incisions, pressure injuries, diabetic foot ulcers, vascular wounds and more) and how to prevent and treat them are generally not well understood in Canadian communities and even within our own health-care systems. People are shocked to learn that:

- Every 4 hours a lower limb amputation occurs due to a non-healing or infected diabetic foot ulcer (Diabetes Canada, 2015). New research shows this number is on the rise, and that the average lower-limb amputation rate in Ontario is twice as high as other high-income jurisdictions with publicly funded health-care systems (Hussain et al, 2019, Behrendt, 2018).
- Infected surgical wounds increase a person's length of stay in hospital (Mujagic et al., 2018).
- Despite the fact that up to 70% of all pressure injuries are preventable, 1 in 4 people in Ontario health-care settings have a pressure injury on any given day. Pressure injuries can extend a hospital stay by 4 to 11 days (Leaf Healthcare, 2016).

However, the rising incidence of acute and hard-to-heal wounds indicates patients and care providers are not identifying wounds in their early stages and that prevention of initial and reoccurring wounds is not happening consistently. Yet evidence-based solutions exist. They have been successfully implemented in various jurisdictions across Canada and internationally, improving patient care, experiences, outcomes and quality of life.

Recognizing that 30-50% of health care involves wound care (Wound Care Alliance, 2012), there is a need for all health-care professionals across all sectors to have a foundation of wound care knowledge and skills to address this significant problem. Continuing education in the form of comprehensive, interdisciplinary, competency-based programming is critical to keep health-care professionals up to date on evidence-informed best practices and skills. Further, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic there is an urgent need for ongoing high quality, easily accessible virtual learning for clinical care providers.

The Wound Care Champions Program delivers evidence-informed, interdisciplinary novice-to-proficient level wound education in two streams: to regulated health-care professionals—including MDs, nurses and allied health professionals—and unregulated care providers. The goal is to provide the full continuum of wound education, from novice to advanced, and support both upstream and downstream interventions (wound prevention and management).

The attached proposal outlines the proposed Wound Care Champions Program in further detail, including a budget and an outline of activities required to complete the design of the program, as well as to implement and evaluate the program.

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