



Inclusion of Foot Orthoses for Patients with Diabetes in the Diabetes Device Fund for Devices and Supplies

September 2024

RECOMMENDATION

The Diabetes Device Fund presents an opportunity to ensure equitable access to necessary supplies and devices for those living with diabetes. To optimize accessibility of the fund and to support early prevention of Diabetes-related foot ulceration (DFU), it is essential that physiotherapists are listed as eligible prescribers of professionally fitted foot orthoses.

We recommend including foot orthoses prescribed by physiotherapists in the Diabetes Device Fund to enhance treatment accessibility and reduce health care costs associated with DFU management and prevention. This inclusion would not only improve patient quality of life but also significantly reduce health care spending.

OPPORTUNITY

The federal government has proposed a new Diabetes Device Fund to support Canadians in managing the substantial health care costs associated with diabetes management, monitoring, and the prevention of complications.^[1]

CHALLENGE

Diabetes is one of the most common chronic conditions affecting Canadians. Its incidence has doubled over the past decade, with expectations that it will continue to increase as Canada's population ages and grows.^[2]

DFU is one of the most common and preventable complications of diabetes, and results in significant disability and mortality rates, as well as increased health care costs. It is the leading cause of lower limb amputation.

In Canada, nearly a quarter of the 5.8 million Canadians^[3] living with diabetes will be affected by a DFU in their lifetime, with a 20% associated risk of limb amputation.^[4,5]

In 2020–2021 and 2022–2023, DFU-related hospitalizations and lower limb amputations cost Canada \$750 million annually, with each amputation averaging around \$47,000 in cost — four times the cost of a hip or knee replacement. Up to 85% of these amputations were preventable, and 43% of those affected were of working age (40–65 years old), resulting in individual and societal costs associated with lost productivity, disability, vocational retraining, and unemployment.^[6]

What are 'Foot Orthoses'?

Orthoses are devices (braces or splints) used to support the posture or alignment of certain body parts. Foot orthoses are worn in the shoe to support the joints and tissues of the feet and specifically to help people with diabetes by re-distributing pressure away from high-risk areas of the feet to minimize risk of ulceration. Given that pressure on the bottom (plantar) surface of the foot is a factor in 90% of DFU cases,^[7]

foot orthoses that offload or reduce pressure are a vital first-line component in prevention and healing of DFU and its associated complications.

In Canada, foot orthoses are fabricated and fitted by qualified professionals, such as orthotists, podiatrists, or pedorthists, but access to prescribers can be limited. Enabling physiotherapists to be listed as eligible prescribers of foot orthoses can help address this limited access.

In addition to their role in preventing and healing DFUs, foot orthoses also enable patients to continue to exercise — a first-line intervention for individuals with diabetes — while helping them maintain functional mobility and protecting their feet from further tissue damage.



KEY ISSUES BY THE NUMBERS

DFU RISK

Nearly **25%**
of Canadians with diabetes will
develop a DFU in their lifetime ⁸

20%
of those who developed a DFU have
an associated risk of limb amputation ^{9,10}

HOSPITALIZATIONS ¹¹

31.2K
annual hospitalizations for
diabetes-related complications
(2020-2023)

7.7K were for lower limb
amputations (ankle,
foot, toe, and leg)
23.5K additional
hospitalizations for
gangrene, ulcers,
and infections

POST-AMPUTATION RISK ¹²

19%
readmission risk after amputation

15%
patient death rate within 30 days
due to cardiovascular issues

PREVENTABILITY ¹³

85% of amputations are preceded by a foot ulcer,
which are largely preventable

COST

At approximately **\$550 per pair**, foot orthoses are a low-cost solution to mitigate the substantial health and economic costs of DFU-related amputations.

\$500 - 550
the average cost
of one pair of
foot orthoses

\$47K the average cost of a
lower-limb amputation

HOW CAN PHYSIOTHERAPY HELP?

Physiotherapists are key members of interprofessional diabetes teams, involved at all levels of care — from primary and secondary prevention of diabetes and its complications, such as heart disease and lower limb amputations, to the rehabilitation and management of those conditions.

Physiotherapists are key members of interprofessional diabetes teams who assess circulation, sensation, skin integrity, and foot and lower extremity biomechanics.^[14] They can identify those at risk for DFU and those who would benefit from professionally fitted foot orthoses, which improve joint support and control, minimize foot deformity development and progression, distribute pressure and weight evenly, and increase comfort.^[15,16] Orthoses aid in both healing and prevention of foot ulcers. People with diabetes may wear foot orthoses in their shoes to decrease pressure under parts of the feet with, or at risk of, an ulcer.

Additionally, physiotherapy professionals have expertise in exercise management, and can help people living with diabetes stay active — a first-line treatment for diabetes management.

About the Canadian Physiotherapy Association

The Canadian Physiotherapy Association represents physiotherapy professionals, including registered physiotherapists, physiotherapist assistants, physiotherapy technologists and students across Canada. Physiotherapy professionals provide essential expertise, rehabilitative care, and treatment, enabling Canadians to live well and actively participate in all facets of their lives.

For more information

Please review the full CPA [Pre-Budget submission](#) or contact Kayla Scott, Senior Director of Advocacy at kscott@physiotherapy.ca



CITATIONS

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