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Older Canadians Lack the Specialized Supports They Need to Manage Diabetes, New Report Shows

More than half of Canadians with Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes are aged 65 and older

TORONTO, June 15, 2023 — Despite the fact that older Canadians are more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes — and more likely to experience severe complications — health care and supports that account for their particular needs are sorely lacking in this country, according to a new report from the National Institute on Ageing (NIA).

The report, [Addressing the Silent Epidemic of Ageing with Diabetes in Canada](#), calls for Canadian health care systems to adopt specialized strategies and supports to ensure that older Canadians living with diabetes, and their unpaid caregivers, don't slip through the cracks.

While diabetes rates are rising for Canadians of all ages, older Canadians are disproportionately affected: just over half of all cases of Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes are among Canadians aged 65 years and above, according to the Canadian Chronic Disease Surveillance System. In addition, older adults can suffer more severe consequences as a result of diabetes, including an increased risk of falls, frailty, dementia and hypoglycemia.

Older adults are also more likely to experience multiple health conditions, which can further complicate their ability to manage their diabetes. For example, they are more likely to experience dementia as they age, which can affect their ability to carry out the day-to-day monitoring needed to manage their diabetes and to recognize when their blood glucose levels are low.

The report found that many older adults living with diabetes find it difficult to manage their condition because of all the different health services they require — including primary care, specialist care, regular foot and eye exams to manage complications that can arise from diabetes, and possibly long-term care services.

“It's no surprise that many older adults living with diabetes, and their unpaid caregivers, find it challenging to navigate Canada's health and social care systems,” said **Dr. Samir Sinha**,

Director of Health Policy Research at the NIA and co-author of the report. “Canada’s systems have not been designed to provide individualized, person-centred and integrated care for older adults living with diabetes and their unpaid caregivers.”

Like other chronic conditions, diabetes can be affected by social determinants of health — such as one’s income, living environment, language skills or membership in one or more equity-seeking groups. This can make it even more difficult for some older adults to control their diabetes, said **Dr. Madison Brydges**, lead author of the report.

“The social determinants of health mediate one’s ability to afford a nutritious diet, afford out-of-pocket medical expenses or attend their medical appointments,” she said. “Many provinces only cover a portion of the costs of diabetes medications and supplies, which can also result in considerable out-of-pocket costs for individuals living with diabetes.”

The NIA makes four recommendations for Canada’s federal, provincial and territorial governments to better support older adults living with diabetes and their unpaid caregivers:

1. Ensure that diabetes health strategies and research appropriately recognize and address the unique issues and needs of older Canadians living with diabetes and their caregivers, and fully engage them in this work.
2. Create national health information systems that address gaps in our understanding of the prevalence and incidence of diabetes and its complications among older Canadians, and improve mechanisms for reporting and screening through provincial/territorial registries.
3. Prioritize improvements to health and social care system navigation, care integration and transitions of care for older adults living with diabetes and their caregivers in a way that centres their needs.
4. View efforts to better address diabetes care through a social determinants of health lens, and ensure that diabetes prevention and ongoing care are appropriately covered and supported through publicly funded health care and social systems.

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About The National Institute on Ageing

The [National Institute on Ageing](#) is a think tank at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) focused on the realities of Canada's ageing population. Follow us on Twitter [@NIAgeing](#) and support our call for a National Seniors Strategy [@NSS Now](#).

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