



Diabetes in Canada: The burden

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This article is the first in a series of three about diabetes in Canada. We start with a look at the burden of the disease and its impact on our health. Then we examine the prevalence of the disease in children and youth, and among First Nations. We wrap up the series with a look at how to reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Diabetes is a serious chronic disease that arises when the body is either not able to produce enough or is unable to use insulin. It is the leading cause of heart attack, strokes, kidney failure, blindness and limb amputation. It is also the leading cause of death by disease in Canada.

A 2011 report from the Public Health Agency of Canada called *Diabetes in Canada: Facts and figures* from a public health perspective provides a comprehensive look at diabetes and its impact on Canadians. It describes a situation of crisis: unless action is taken, diabetes will threaten the lives of millions more Canadians and endanger the future sustainability of our healthcare system.

How extensive is diabetes in Canada? In 2009 almost 2.4 million Canadians were living with diabetes. Worse, about 20% of diabetes cases remain undiagnosed. In the decade to 2009, diagnosed cases of diabetes increased by 70% in Canada. Among those aged 35 to 44, the proportion doubled. At current trends, it is estimated that in ten years, the number of cases will rise to 3.7 million. Currently, more than 338,000 British Colum-

bians are living with diabetes; this number is projected to increase by 62% over the next decade.

The health impact of diabetes is significant and costly, both in terms of suffering and illness and financially.

People with diabetes are three times more likely to be hospitalized with cardiovascular disease than individuals without diabetes. They are 12 times more likely to be hospitalized with end-stage renal (kidney) disease, and almost 20 times more likely to be hospitalized with non-traumatic lower limb amputations.

Diabetes shares a number of risk factors with other chronic diseases: 36.5% of Canadian adults with diabetes also reported two or more serious chronic conditions including high blood pressure (hypertension), heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease,

mood disorder, and/or arthritis. For every age group, individuals with diabetes face mortality rates at least twice as high as higher than those without.

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Diabetes is not only a cause of serious disease and death, it also has a significant impact on people's quality of life.

Reports from Public Health Canada and the Canadian Diabetes Association show that while some progress has been made by governments in addressing diabetes, this progress is dwarfed by the growing burden of the disease.