

# Coverage of Needles, Syringes and Lancets Across Canada

## Background

There are over four million people living with diagnosed diabetes in Canada. Diabetes is a chronic, progressive condition that affects the body's ability to regulate the amount of glucose (sugar) in the blood. It has no cure but can be managed through an individualized combination of lifestyle approaches and medications.

[Self-monitoring of blood glucose \(SMBG\)](#) is one way for people living with diabetes to measure and assess their glycemic range. To measure blood sugar a blood glucose meter (glucometer). You can take insulin with pens, syringes, or pumps according to your personal preference.

People with diabetes are responsible for disposing of syringes, needles and lancets (the device that punctures your skin when testing your blood glucose) and related materials in the safest possible manner.

Reimbursement from the government for needles, syringes and lancets is provided through provincial drug plans and programs and is based on prescribed course of treatment, age and income (see chart on page 2).

## Challenges

Public coverage varies across the country. Some provincial plans reimburse the entire cost of needles, syringes, and lancets for people who are eligible, and others provide little to no reimbursement at all.

## Policy Implications

The out-of-pocket cost of needles, syringes and lancets is high for Canadians residing in provinces with limited coverage and/or co pays and deductibles, and for those who do not meet the eligibility criteria for their provincial plan. Private insurance can help offset the cost of needles, syringes and lancets, but many Canadians do not have access to these plans.

Those who cannot afford needles, syringes and lancets manage their diabetes according to best practice recommendations. Unmanaged diabetes can have very serious short and long-term effects and represents a burden to individuals, families, and Canadian society at large. Significant and unnecessary costs are incurred from lost productivity and high health-care system use secondary to diabetes and its complications.

## Recommendations

Diabetes Canada recommends that eligibility clauses should allow needles, syringes and lancets coverage without restrictions. In every jurisdiction, where they are a barrier to access, co-pays and deductibles on needles, syringes and lancets should be limited or eliminated. People living with diabetes across Canada should also have access to the education and supports they require that allow them to test with purpose and effectively self-manage their conditions.



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| Jurisdiction                     | Coverage of Needles, Syringes and Other Supplies                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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| <a href="#">Yukon</a>            | Coverage under the Chronic Disease and Disability Benefits Program                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Northwest Territories</b>     | Coverage for needles, syringes and lancets as per NIHB coverage                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Nunavut</b>                   | Coverage for needles, syringes and lancets as per NIHB coverage                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <a href="#">British Columbia</a> | PharmaCare covers needles and syringes for insulin therapy for patients with insulin-dependent diabetes only.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <a href="#">Alberta</a>          | Coverage for Seniors Program and the Non-Group Coverage Plans cover eligible diabetes supplies includes needles, syringes, and lancets.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <a href="#">Saskatchewan</a>     | Saskatchewan Drug Plan covers diabetic supplies such as needles, syringes, lancets and swabs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <a href="#">Manitoba</a>         | Manitoba Pharmacare Program covers needles, syringes and lancets                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Ontario</b>                   | <p><a href="#">Insulin Syringes for Seniors Program</a> covers insulin syringes and needles for seniors (65+ years) who need insulin every day and live at home, can apply for \$170 annually</p> <p>The Ontario Disability Support Program may cover costs of the diabetic supplies (supplies include needles and syringes, alcohol swabs, platforms, lancets) for members of the benefit unit as <a href="#">Mandatory Special Necessities (MSN)</a> if not otherwise covered or reimbursed.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities Program</a> may provide financial support to parents or guardians who are caring for a child with a severe disability. This program provides financial support for <a href="#">eligible families</a> to cover some of the extra costs of caring for a child who has a severe disability. Eligible parents and guardians can receive between \$25 and \$646 a month to help with disability-related costs.</p> |
| <a href="#">New Brunswick</a>    | <p>Must show that you've exhausted all your other options, including the <a href="#">Seniors' Health Program</a>, and are still unable to pay for your diabetic supplies.</p> <p>Social Development may provide help for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blood Glucose Testing Supplies: lancets (small needles), test strips (blood and/or urine), alcohol swabs, flash monitoring systems, glucose testing meter (usually provided free)</li> <li>Supplies for Insulin Administration: syringes, pen needles, alcohol swabs</li> </ul> <p>The Department of Social Development assesses eligibility on a case-by-case basis. If you are a resident of New Brunswick who is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newly diagnosed with diabetes</li> <li>Taking oral medications</li> <li>Insulin-dependent</li> </ul> <p>and unable to afford diabetic supplies, you may be eligible for help.</p>                                                               |
| <a href="#">Nova Scotia</a>      | Diabetes Assistance Program. Standard benefits include: • insulin and analogues, oral blood glucose lowering drugs • blood glucose test strips, needles, syringes, and lancets.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

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| <b>Prince Edward Island</b>               | No coverage                                                                              |
| <b><u>Newfoundland &amp; Labrador</u></b> | Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program covers needles, syringes and lancets |
| <b><u>NIHB</u></b>                        | Coverage for needles, syringes and lancets                                               |

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