



WoundsAustralia

**Pre-Budget Submission
to fight Australia's
chronic wound epidemic**

January 2022

The Solution is Bleeding Obvious



WoundsAustralia

Australia's peak body for
wound prevention and management

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Introduction



Wounds Australia is proud to present its first pre-Budget submission.

Its development follows intensive discussions with the Minister for Health & Ageing, invaluable guidance from Departmental officials, and contributions from clinical experts.

This means we have clearly identified solutions supported by research and clinical expertise. They will address the priority issues to solve the current 'hidden' chronic wound epidemic.

Our solutions are based on the expertise of health and aged care professionals, patients and at-risk groups, and specialists in Australia's health and aged care systems.

This document is a plan that:

- delivers significant savings in the health and aged care budgets
- prevents thousands from entering the healthcare system each year
- reduces the incidence and intensity of wounds
- enhances Australia's tertiary education system
- improves the skills of rural and regional health and aged care workforces.

Wounds Australia is the national peak body for wound prevention and management. With thousands of members across Australia from a broad spectrum of medical and allied health specialisations, along with researchers and scientists, we are the voice of those living with chronic wounds and the health professionals who care for them.

This means our solutions have been crafted with a genuine understanding of the current national crisis in chronic wounds.

Wounds Australia sees this submission as a vital first step in ensuring the federal government benefits from our desire to act as a genuine partner in building systems that meets your policy and program objectives, in the most affordable and effective manner.

The solutions we have detailed in the following pages must be regarded as a priority for our nation's health and aged care sectors. Without urgently addressing wound treatment, Australia's 'hidden epidemic' will continue to escalate and burden the physical and emotional health of the country, while draining billions of dollars away from other vital priorities.



The figures and impacts speak for themselves:

- Each year over 420,000 Australians suffer from a chronic wound.
- Over \$3 billion of the nation's aged care and health care budgets is spent on chronic wounds.
- Each chronic wounds patient spends over \$4,000 on out-of-pocket costs. With most patients over 65, that places unbearable pressure on pensioners and retirees.

Patients are prevented from working, studying, exercising and doing simple daily tasks everyone else takes for granted. In addition, wound patients are also likely to suffer from social stigma that can lead to serious mental health issues.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

Best practice wound care is focussed on healing the wound and delivering the best possible health outcomes for the person living with a chronic wound.

Wounds Australia's submission is a clear and effective blueprint that will ensure wound care costs less and delivers better care to more people. We look forward to working closely with the federal government to develop, implement and support these important health and aged care solutions.

Hayley Ryan

Chair, Wounds Australia



Wounds Australia's Budget Priorities to fight chronic wounds

The Hidden Epidemic

420,000

Australians suffer from chronic wounds



\$4,000

Average out-of-pocket costs each year



\$3 billion

cost to annual health & aged care budgets

The Solution



Create a National Wound Services Scheme to subsidise wound products for people with venous leg ulcers or diabetic foot ulcers, people aged 65+ & government concession card holders



Raise awareness of chronic wounds through a national public health campaign



Introduce wound care education for primary healthcare & aged care workforces, particularly in rural & remote regions



Map care pathways for chronic wound care



Introduce wound care units of competency in tertiary education courses



Reimburse home support, home care & residential aged care providers for wound care education



Introduce Medicare funding for the treatment of chronic wounds in primary health care

The solution is bleeding obvious

Budget Priorities

Create a National Wound Services Scheme to subsidise wound products for:

- **people with venous leg ulcers or diabetic foot ulcers**
- **people aged 65+**
- **government concession card holders**

Current situation

- 420,000 Australians suffer from chronic wounds each year.
 - Patients pay out-of-pocket costs of \$4,000 per year, on average.
- Anyone can suffer a chronic wound. However, some people are more vulnerable due to their age or underlying conditions:
 - Venous leg ulcers are the most common chronic wound seen in Australian primary care.
 - Diabetic foot disease affects approx. 50,000 Australians each year, with a further 300,000 having risk factors for developing this condition.
 - People over 65 are vulnerable to chronic wounds due to complications associated with ageing.
- There are major financial and medical barriers to reducing chronic wounds:
 - Patients delay seeing a health professional because they cannot afford to get their wound treated.
 - This results in significant pain, infection and other complications, leading to avoidable hospitalisations, amputations and deaths.
- Chronic wounds reduce people's ability to work, study and enjoy the lifestyle that others take for granted.
 - Chronic wounds are extremely painful, reducing people's mobility which further increases the risk of serious complications.
 - Sufferers are at risk of mental health issues including anxiety and depression resulting from social isolation, changes to body image, and significantly decreased quality of life.
- The cost of treatment is often unaffordable. For example, venous leg ulcer patients over 60 pay approx. \$27.5 million in out-of-pocket costs for wound care consumables each year.



Proposed solution

- Establish a National Wound Services Scheme administered by Wounds Australia for people with venous leg ulcers, diabetic foot ulcers, people over 65 and government concession card holders.
 - This Scheme would allow eligible patients to be registered by a health professional with wound care expertise such as a GP, nurse practitioner or relevant allied health professional.
- Establish a Clinical Advisory Committee for this Scheme that would:
 - develop clinical eligibility criteria for participants
 - recommend wound care consumables and treatment options that would be subsidised under the Scheme
 - identify appropriate clinical experts that could register participants.
- Wounds Australia administers the scheme, allowing people with wounds and their families to:
 - understand the wound warning signs
 - access services, support and subsidised wound care products.

Benefits to government and the community

- This Scheme will reduce the cost and length of healing time for people who are most at risk of chronic wounds.
 - It will remove key barriers to reducing the incidence of chronic wounds, which are the cost of treatment and receiving appropriate care.
 - It will ensure chronic wounds are healed more effectively in the community, reducing avoidable pain, infection and complications that need more costly treatment.
- This solution supports Stream 2 (Person-centred primary health care) of *Australia's Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan 2022-2032*.
- Appropriate treatment of venous leg ulcers alone could save national health and aged care budgets over \$166 million per year.

Case Study: Cost of wound care

The typical self-funded retiree's annual income is \$44,000. For a single pensioner, it is a maximum of \$25,000. If they are one of 350,000 Australians over 65 years who suffer from a chronic wound, they will spend an average of \$4,000 each year on out-of-pocket costs. Those with venous leg ulcers and diabetic foot ulcers face even greater expenses.

Wounds Australia, through our extensive membership, identified a patient who, due to the nature of their chronic wound, is out of pocket on average over \$50,000 each year and this does not include the travel expenses and pain killers desperately needed to manage their debilitating condition.



Raise awareness of chronic wounds through a national public health campaign

Current situation

- Australians delay treatment for wounds because they do not know the warning signs or where to seek help.
 - This significantly increases the healing time and cost of treatment.
- Health professionals often do not have the knowledge to heal chronic wounds using current best practice.
- Gaining access to health professionals who specialise in wound prevention, care and management is challenging, particularly in rural and regional areas, leaving many patients to suffer alone and in silence.
- Wounds Australia has successfully grown its member funded Wound Awareness Week to build awareness of chronic wounds with patients, health professionals and decision makers.
 - This established framework provides the perfect platform to build a successful national campaign that reaches a broader audience with tailored resources and activities.

Proposed solution

- Fund \$2 million over four years to create a national media and digital campaign on chronic wound prevention and treatment, building on Wound Awareness Week.
 - Raise awareness with people at risk of chronic wounds through mainstream and health media, using personal stories.
 - Share wound care education and resources with health professionals and their patients via Primary Health Networks, universities, peak bodies and health professional member organisations.
 - Include federal and state Chief Nursing & Midwifery Officers to share campaign messages and resources on social media with health professionals and their networks.
 - Use health professionals as campaign ambassadors to target key wound care professions such as GPs, nurses and allied health.
- Wounds Australia has the expertise, networks and track record to successfully spearhead this ambitious project.



Benefits to government and the community

- This campaign will improve community awareness and health literacy about wounds.
 - People will know the warning signs and how to seek treatment.
 - Health professionals will know where to find the education and resources to improve their wound care expertise.
- It will deliver savings to health and aged care budgets by:
 - encouraging people to seek early treatment, avoiding lengthy and costly chronic wounds
 - improving health professionals' wound care expertise, allowing wounds to be healed more quickly in the community using best practice.
- This solution supports aims of the *National Preventative Health Strategy 2021-2030*, particularly:
 - Investment in prevention is increased.
 - All Australians live in good health and wellbeing for as long as possible.

Case Study: Older Australians

More than 420,000 Australians suffer from a chronic wound each year. Over 350,000 of them are 65 years or older.

This means there are approximately 2,900 people and 2,400 seniors suffering from the painful burden in every federal electorate.

Most people hide their wounds or choose a reclusive lifestyle. This problem is a hidden epidemic that significantly impacts the sufferer as well as their partners, families and communities.

A public awareness campaign will educate people on the wound warning signs, where to seek help and how their wounds can be healed. The reduction in incidence, severity and costs will also reduce social stigma, ensuring Australians can participate in work, lead more active lifestyles and actively contribute to their communities.



Introduce wound care education for primary health care & aged care workforces, particularly in rural & remote regions

Current situation

- Wound care education is inadequate in courses for early and mid-career health professionals.
- Health professionals do not stay up to date with current best practice wound care, leading to poorer patient outcomes and more costly treatment.

Proposed solution

- Fund the development of minimum curriculum standards for early and mid-career health professionals' courses in aged care, medicine, nursing and relevant allied health disciplines.
- Wounds Australia is best placed to coordinate the development of these standards, as the peak body for wound prevention and management.

Benefits to government and the community

- This measure will improve wound management practice through the adoption of best practice, based on the latest research and education delivery models.
- Evidence based education will keep people out of hospital, reducing healing time and ensuring best practice wound care is available to all Australians.
- This will improve career pathways for health professionals.

Case Study: Graham Swatridge

With Bega's High Risk Foot Services clinic closing its doors five years ago, Graham Swatridge is now forced to drive a six-hour round trip every fortnight for treatment because no health care professional closer to home has the knowledge or skills to help him.

Basic wound care training that will allow health and aged care professionals to identify and treat the wounds of patients will significantly reduce the incidence of chronic wounds. It will ensure retirees, aged care residents and other at-risk Australians can receive early intervention and care in their community.



Introduce wound care units of competency in tertiary education courses including:

- Bachelor of Medicine
- Bachelor of Nursing
- Certificates III & IV in Aged Care
- Bachelor of Pharmacy
- Podiatry & other Allied Health degrees & courses with wound care responsibilities

Current situation

- There are very few mandatory wound care units in tertiary courses for medicine, nursing and aged care.
 - These courses include only one to two hours on wound care.
 - Most health and aged care tertiary courses do not have optional or elective units on wound care.
- Aged care, medicine, nursing and allied health students do not graduate with the right knowledge and skills to prevent and heal wounds.
- The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety recommended that by January 2022, reviews of Certificate III and IV courses in aged care should consider additional units of competency in wound care (recommendation 79).
 - Wounds Australia recommends expanding this to include medicine, nursing and relevant allied health tertiary courses.
 - This ensures that the majority of health students who are likely to encounter a wound can heal it based on best practice.

Proposed solution

- Fund development of minimum curriculum standards for tertiary courses in aged care, medicine, nursing and relevant allied health disciplines.
- Wounds Australia is best placed to coordinate the development of these standards, as the peak body for wound prevention and management.

Benefits to government and the community

- The inclusion of wound care units in tertiary education courses will ensure that health professionals can prevent and heal wounds more effectively.
- This solution supports Stream 2 (Person-centred primary health care) of *Australia's Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan 2022-2032*.



Case Study: David Robinson

The absence of wound care modules in medical, nursing and allied healthcare degrees can result in horrific and avoidable complications.

In 2020, David Robinson almost lost his life, along with his foot, because hospital doctors and nurses lacked wound care training.

Their knowledge gap meant they failed to consider how David's diabetes caused lack of feeling in his feet, meaning he would not realise he was rubbing his foot against the hospital bedframe.

When a small wound developed on the bottom of his foot, doctors and nurses could not appreciate the risk it posed and didn't treat it. By the time he was home, the seemingly insignificant sore had developed into a diabetic leg ulcer.

David's life was saved by a chance visit to his podiatrist. Having undertaken extracurricular wound care studies, the podiatrist immediately identified the problem and initiated the treatment that prevented the loss of David's entire leg or even worse, his life. After an eight month long battle, surgeons were left with no choice other than life-saving amputations.



Map care pathways for chronic wound care

Current situation

- Access to specialist wound care is inconsistent across Australia and the standard of wound care treatment is variable.
- Finding the right treatment is complex and costly for patients, resulting in delays to healing and complications which lead to avoidable pain, infections, hospitalisations and deaths.

Proposed solution

- Conduct a national mapping exercise to identify care pathways between primary care and specialist services including:
 - developing evidence-based recommendations for treating and healing chronic wounds that are based on current international best practice
 - consulting key wound management health professionals about best practice recommendations
 - gathering experiential data from health professionals and patients on chronic wounds including current barriers to timely treatment and healing
 - translating complex research into practical treatment guidance for health professionals that focuses on wound healing, rather than wound treatment.
- Develop a practical and evidence-based clinical pathway for preventing and managing chronic wounds.

Benefits to government and the community

- This measure would ensure Australia's approach to wound care prioritises healing a wound, regardless of the diagnosis or cause.
- Mapping care pathways will:
 - improve standards of care leading to reduced treatment and healing time for patients
 - reduce inconsistent care, wound care costs and health professionals' time required to manage chronic wounds
 - provide evidence-based guidance to help health professionals to improve patient outcomes, based on best practice.
- This solution supports Stream 3 (Integrated care, locally delivered) of *Australia's Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan 2022-2032*.



Reimburse home support, home care & residential aged care providers for wound care education

Current situation

- The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety recommended that commencing on 1 July 2021, a scheme to reimburse home support, home care and residential aged care providers for the cost of education and training, including continuing education in pressure injuries and wound management should be established (recommendation 114).

Proposed solution

- Implement a scheme to reimburse home support, home care and residential aged care providers for the cost of education, including continuing education in pressure injuries and wound management.

Benefits to government and the community

- This scheme will improve health professionals' ability to prevent, identify and manage pressure injuries and other wounds from developing, leading to healthier older Australians in home care and residential care.
 - This includes improved skills to report pressure injuries under the National Aged Care Mandatory Quality Indicator Program.
- This solution also supports Stream 2 (Person-centred primary health care) of *Australia's Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan 2022-2032*.



Introduce Medicare funding for the treatment of chronic wounds in primary health care

Current situation

- Australians need universal, equitable access to care for chronic wounds.
- Most people cannot access public funding to cover the products required to treat chronic wounds and the time required to apply them.
 - Primary care health professionals must either subsidise wound care consumables, use low quality dressings or pass the full cost onto patients.
 - Using low quality or inappropriate dressings increases the time required to heal chronic wounds, which leads to poorer patient outcomes.
- Patients must navigate a complex, costly system that does not prioritise early, effective healing of their wounds.

Proposed solution

- Add new items to the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) to fund:
 - assessment of wounds
 - consumables required to heal a wound
 - development of wound management plans for patients
 - nursing time required to apply wound dressings.
- These MBS items should be accessible to GPs, nurse practitioners and relevant allied health professionals.
- Wound care clinics led by nurse practitioners offer an existing model that could use these MBS items to heal chronic wounds effectively in the community.

Benefits to government and the community

- This approach allows Australians to heal their chronic wounds effectively in the community.
- It will deliver significant savings to government:
 - Fewer people would delay initial treatment for a wound.
 - The incidence, severity and healing time for chronic wounds would reduce, avoiding the need for further treatment and hospitalisation as wounds worsen.
- It would significantly improve patient outcomes, including their ability to engage in the workforce and broader community.



Case Study: Jenna Allen

The sting of a red back spider bite seven years ago has forced 28-year-old Jenna Allen into a life of financial hardship. To treat the consistent flare-ups and pain, Jenna has relied on financial support from family, friends and a public GoFundMe page.

The chronic nature of the painful and unsightly spider bite means Jenna can spend up to \$500 a fortnight on dressings. Living in western Victoria, the cost of travel to see a doctor with training in wound care, along with consultation fees and pain killers, are an additional burden.

With Medicare failing to cover chronic wound care costs, Jenna is one of hundreds of thousands of Australians having to choose between her treatment and day-to-day needs of her young family.

The inclusion of chronic wound treatment costs in Medicare will help Jenna step away from American-style charity healthcare. It will also prevent Australians from making the same choice between household expenses and seeking treatment for their chronic wounds.



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