

The cost of diabetes

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The president of the Canadian Diabetes Association (CDA) delivered a warning Wednesday that diabetes not only threatens the physical health of Canadians, but the financial well being of our healthcare system.

Michael Cloutier, president and CEO of the CDA had a somber message for a standing-room-only audience at the Sutton Place Hotel in Toronto.

"The economic burden of diabetes in Ontario is staggering and threatens the sustainability of our healthcare system and provincial economy," he said. "It's estimated the direct and indirect financial impact of diabetes in Ontario currently costs the province \$4.9 billion per year. By 2020, these costs will increase to \$7 billion per year if we don't take action."

However, there are steps that can be taken to lessen this burden. The CDA is suggesting that the government of Ontario and the private sector commit to supporting the association's three-pronged approach—the creation of a broad-based diabetes prevention strategy, a strategy that targets populations at risk (Aboriginals, new Canadians and women from low-income households) and a diabetes secondary prevention strategy that helps people better self-manage their illness.

According to national survey data from the Public Health Agency of Canada, diabetes is associated with more frequent disability days and increased loss of productivity. Among the working-age population (35 to 64 years), 23% of people with diabetes had one or more disability days in a two-week period, compared with only 11% of those without diabetes.

Cloutier says the CDA has a host of partnering opportunities for employers that are looking to give guidance to their workforce on nutrition and fitness and to educate their employees on the importance of medication compliance.

"[We] need the support of the private sector. It's good corporate responsibility, but it also makes good economic and business sense," he said. "Eighty percent of diabetes costs are related to complications, not disease management."