

# 5 Point Plan

to solve Australia's  
chronic wound epidemic



**WoundsAustralia**  
*Healing Wounds Together*



**Wounds Australia** is the national peak body for wound prevention and management.

We are the voice of those living with chronic wounds and the health professionals who care for them.

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# 5 Point Plan to solve Chronic Wounds

## The Hidden Epidemic



**450,000**

Australians suffer from chronic wounds



**\$4,000**

Average out-of-pocket costs each year



**\$6.6 billion**

cost to annual health & aged care budgets

## The Solution



Extend free wound care to people at high risk of chronic wounds



Establish an ongoing National Wound Prevention Campaign



Expert wound support in primary and aged care



Wound care education for primary and aged care



World-leading Australian wound care research





# Our Vision



## **Stop wounds becoming chronic**

preventing thousands from entering the health system each year



## **Empower Australians**

to understand the wound warning signs and where to get help



## **Upskill Australia's health and aged care workforce**

to prevent and heal chronic wounds

# Introduction – Prof Fiona Wood AO

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## Board Director, Wounds Australia

Wounds Australia is proud to present our 5 Point Plan for solving Australia's hidden epidemic of chronic wounds.

The figures speak for themselves:



- Each year, 450,000 Australians have a chronic wound.
- Chronic wounds cost Australia's health and aged care budgets over \$6.6 billion each year.
- Each person with a chronic wound spends on average over \$4,000 a year in out-of-pocket costs.
- With most people with chronic wounds aged over 65, chronic wounds can place unbearable pressure on pensioners and retirees.

A chronic wound affects every part of a person's life.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

### Our 5 Point Plan

Wounds Australia has a vision for quality cost-effective wound care that puts people at the heart of our health and aged care systems.

We can solve chronic wounds by investing in evidence-based prevention, assessment, treatment and education.

Our Plan will:

- reduce the incidence and intensity of chronic wounds, saving lives and limbs
- deliver significant savings to Australia's health and aged care budgets
- prevent thousands from entering the health system each year
- improve the skills of health and aged care workforces, particularly in rural and regional areas.

### We can't afford to miss a moment

This Plan must be a priority for our nation's health and aged care sectors.

Without urgent reform, chronic wounds will continue to burden the physical and emotional health of our country.

We look forward to working closely with state and federal governments to turn this ambition into action.

# Wounds Australia's 5 Point Plan

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## 1. Extend free wound care to people at high risk of chronic wounds

### Current situation

- 450,000 Australians have chronic wounds each year.
  - People must navigate a complex costly system that does not prioritise early effective healing of their wounds.
- Anyone can get a chronic wound. However, some people are more vulnerable due to their age or long term chronic conditions like diabetes.
  - For example, every day in Australia, 50,000 people have diabetic foot disease (DFD), 1,000 are in hospital due to this condition, 12 will undergo a DFD-related amputation and four people will die due to DFD.
- The lack of access to free or low cost wound care means we are missing opportunities to prevent and heal chronic wounds.
  - People delay seeing a health professional because they cannot afford to get their wound treated.
  - Australians with chronic wounds pay out-of-pocket costs of \$4,000 per year, on average.
  - Delayed treatment and healing can result in significant pain, infection and other complications, leading to avoidable hospitalisations, amputations and deaths.
- Most people cannot access public funding to cover the products and time required to treat chronic wounds.
  - Primary care health professionals must either subsidise wound care consumables, use low quality dressings or pass the full cost onto their patients.
  - Use of inappropriate dressings and lack of access to treatment increases the time required to heal chronic wounds, which leads to poorer patient outcomes and significantly increased costs to health and aged care budgets.



## Proposed solutions

- Extend the Chronic Wound Consumables Scheme to people over 40 years with chronic conditions that increase the risk of chronic wounds.
- Extend the Chronic Wound Consumables Scheme to include treatment time by a GP, Nurse Practitioner, podiatrist, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioner or wound clinician with expert wound care training.
- Establish a national wound care registry covering all participants receiving support from the Chronic Wound Consumables Scheme to capture wound care imagery, treatment algorithms and patient outcomes.

## Benefits to government and the community

- Targeting people most at risk will reduce the health and economic cost of chronic wounds by removing the most significant barrier to effective treatment: the cost of wound care.
- This will deliver savings to governments by:
  - improving capacity in primary care, community health and hospitals by improving chronic wound healing times
  - significantly enhancing patient outcomes, including their ability to engage in the workforce and broader community
  - reducing avoidable pain, infection and complications from chronic wounds that require more costly treatment.
- Appropriate treatment of venous leg ulcers alone could save health and aged care budgets A\$1.4 billion over five years.
- This solution supports Stream 2 (Person-centred primary health care) of Australia's Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan 2022-2032.

## 2. Establish an ongoing National Wound Prevention 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 evidence-based practice.
- Gaining access to health professionals who specialise in wound prevention, care and management is challenging, particularly in rural and regional areas.
- Australia needs an large-scale national campaign to produce the generational behavioural changes and resulting health and aged care savings from consumers and clinicians being 'wound aware'.

### Proposed solutions

- Extend current Federal Government funding to create an ongoing national wound care education and awareness campaign on chronic wound prevention and treatment.
- Establish clinician-focused campaigns to improve:
  - knowledge and use of the *Australian Standards for Wound Prevention and Management* by health and aged care health professionals
  - understanding of the wound warning signs in aged care support workers and Assistants in Nursing.

### Benefits to government and the community

- This campaign will improve community awareness and health literacy about chronic 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.



- These recommendations will deliver health and aged care savings 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 current evidence-based practice.
- This solution supports the National Preventative Health Strategy 2021-2030 and the National Rural & Remote Nursing Generalist Framework 2023–2027.

## 3. Expert wound support in primary & aged care

### Current situation

- Access to affordable wound care is inequitable across Australia.
- Finding the right treatment is complex and costly for people with chronic wounds, resulting in delays to healing and complications which lead to avoidable pain, infections, hospitalisations and deaths.
- Due to the lack of effective prevention and early intervention, chronic wounds are a significant burden for Australian hospitals, primary care, residential aged care and community health services.
  - Hospitalisations incur high service costs, including regular investigations such as pathology and microbiology, specialist attendances, and high costs associated with length of stay.
  - On average, people are hospitalised for a month due to their wound.
  - The initial economic burden of a low limb amputation is on average AU\$26,555, with ongoing annual costs of over \$6,000.
- The current primary and aged care models promote a focus on low-cost short term care, rather than a holistic person-centred approach.
  - A person's age, risk factors and comorbidities have a major impact on their ability to heal a wound.

### Proposed solutions

- Establish a hotline under the Chronic Wound Consumables Scheme to provide expert wound care advice to:
  - people at risk of, or who currently have, a chronic wound, and their carers
  - primary care clinicians including those at Medicare Urgent Care Clinics
  - hospitals and specialist medical practices
  - residential aged care
  - emergency health care.

- Develop a staged model for primary wound care under the Chronic Wound Consumables Scheme including support for:
  - primary and aged care clinicians' access to wound care advice via a national hotline
  - a referral pathway for people with a non-healing wound within four weeks of a wound appearance or early deterioration of their wound
  - wound management plans and regular holistic wound assessments for referred patients by GPs, Nurse Practitioners or wound clinicians with expert wound care training
  - regular treatment by practice nurses, podiatrists, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners or Aboriginal Health Workers with wound care training
  - consultations with relevant clinicians based on a person's risk factors/comorbidities
  - integration with community-based health services
  - referrals to acute services if hospitalisation or surgery is required.
- Develop a staged model for wound care in residential aged care including support for:
  - aged care support workers and Assistants in Nursing to escalate a resident's wound warning signs to the Registered Nurse on duty
  - a referral pathway for residents with a non-healing wound within four weeks of a wound appearance or early deterioration of their wound
  - wound management plans and regular holistic wound assessments for referred patients by GPs, Nurse Practitioners or wound clinicians with expert wound care training
  - regular treatment in residential aged care by aged care support workers, Assistants in Nursing and nurses with wound care training, with a focus on maintaining people's functional capacity
  - consultation with relevant clinicians based on a person's risk factors and comorbidities
  - referral to acute services if hospitalisation or surgery is required.

## Benefits to government and the community

- This measure would ensure Australia's approach to wound care supports a holistic person-centred approach to healing a wound, regardless of the diagnosis or cause.
- Wound treatment delivered in primary care is cheaper than receiving care through a hospital outpatient clinic or other community health care setting.
- Staged care models will:
  - improve standards of care, leading to reduced treatment and healing time for people with chronic wounds
  - reduce inconsistent care, wound care costs and health professionals' time required to manage chronic wounds
  - support evidence-based care, which will reduce avoidable pain, infections, hospitalisations and deaths.
- This solution supports Stream 3 (Integrated care, locally delivered, person centred care) of *Australia's Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan 2022-2032*.

## 4. Wound care education for primary & aged care

### Current situation

Chronic wounds add pressure to every part of Australia's health and aged care systems



- Aged care, medicine, nursing and allied health students do not graduate with the evidence-based knowledge and skills to prevent and heal wounds.
- Early and mid-career primary and aged care health professionals are not keeping up with evidence-based wound care practice, missing opportunities to prevent chronic wounds.
- The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety recommended the establishment of a scheme to reimburse home support, home care and residential aged care providers for the cost of education and training, including continuing professional development in pressure injuries and wound management (recommendation 114).

## **Proposed solutions**

### ***Wound care education in tertiary courses***

- Support post-award micro-credential courses in wound care for recent graduates in aged care, medicine, nursing, allied health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.
- Support tertiary education providers to run modules on wound care as part of the following degree courses:
  - Certificates III and IV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care
  - Certificate III & IV in Aged Care
  - Bachelor of Medicine, Nursing and Pharmacy
  - allied health qualifications.

### ***Primary health care workforces, particularly in rural and remote areas***

- Support accessible wound care training for staff in national, state and territory consumer health hotlines, e.g. HealthDirect.
- Support low cost wound care courses to support GPs, Nurse Practitioners, practice nurses, allied health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners.

### ***Aged care workforce***

- Reimburse home support, home care and residential aged care providers for the cost of education and training, including continuing professional development in pressure injuries and wound management.
- Fund paid time for aged care support workers and Assistants in Nursing to access wound care training.
- Support accessible wound care training for in-hospital aged care teams.

*Wounds Australia is best placed to coordinate the following solutions, as the peak body for wound prevention and management.*



## Benefits to government and the community

- Accessible wound care training for primary and aged care clinicians will ensure people can get the right diagnosis and treatment at the right time.
  - This will increase capacity in GP clinics, community health and hospitals by reducing wound healing times and the incidence of chronic wounds.
  - It will also provide new career pathways for health and aged care clinicians in wound care.
- Targeted training will improve the ability of aged care support workers and Assistants in Nursing to prevent, identify and manage pressure injuries and other wounds from developing, leading to healthier older Australians.
  - This includes improved skills to report pressure injuries under the National Aged Care Mandatory Quality Indicator Program.

## 5. World-leading Australian wound care research

### Current situation

- Australian wound care research is producing world-leading innovations.
  - However, we are missing opportunities to reduce the health and economic cost of chronic wounds due to research gaps in wound prevalence, prevention, early intervention and treatment options for common chronic wound types based on Australian data.
- Wounds Australia has partnered with the Australian Health Research Alliance to establish the Wound Care Initiative, producing the foundations for reducing the economic and health burden of wound care. This includes:
  - determining the actual costs of wound care based on evidence-based practice
  - updating National Wound Care Standards
  - developing an integrated training and education framework
  - creating a plan to develop a coordinated program of research excellence.
- We need to use these foundations to guide the next generation of Australian wound care research.

### Proposed solutions

- Establish wound research priorities for the Medical Research Future Fund and the NHMRC with a focus on:
  - holistic people-centred research to reduce wound healing time
  - risk factors, diagnosis and treatment options for common wound types such as venous leg ulcers, diabetic foot ulcers and pressure injuries
  - pain management for chronic wounds
  - community-based people-centred care models.
- Place equal emphasis on 'blue sky' research, research translation and commercialisation of wound care innovations.

## **Benefits to government and the community**

- Investment in a coordinated approach to funding wound care research will deliver the next generation of evidence to help solve chronic wounds.
- This is the foundation for making significant and enduring reductions in the prevalence and cost of chronic wounds.



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