

Mapping diabetes

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The Alberta Diabetes Surveillance System was created in 2006 in partnership between Alberta Health and Wellness and the Institute of Health Economics. Led by Jeff Johnson in the University of Alberta's School of Public Health, the group has been identifying trends in diabetes, its associated health conditions and monitoring trends in accessing health-care services and has published a comprehensive report called a Diabetes Atlas every two years.

The challenge, says Johnson, is that "as soon as we publish our report, it's a little out of date."

One of the group's goals was to create a way to share information easily and quickly across the province. A new interactive website, developed by the Alberta Diabetes [Surveillance System](#), takes years of research and puts it at the fingertips of health-care professionals, [health policy](#) and decision-makers, and even the general public.

"Access to current information and trends can be vital in the planning and delivery of services in this province," says Johnson.

The interactive diabetes surveillance system website is funded by Alberta Health and Wellness.

Based on the information received, Johnson says, "we can identify trends over time, across geography and age, as well as pinpoint hotspots in the diabetes population."

"The research has been compiled to provide a practical service for health-care providers and policymakers in our province," says Johnson.

The website can be queried on a broad number of variables such as incidence, the number of new cases of diabetes over a specific time period; prevalence, the proportion of people in a population who have diabetes at a certain period of time; and mortality, number or rate of deaths during a specific period. Users can sort results by age group, location of residence, Aboriginal status and sex.

Besides finding out information just about diabetes rates, users can also find out about patterns of provincial health-care utilization by people with diabetes such as physician visits, emergency room encounters and hospitalizations. Users can also find out information about [health conditions](#) associated with diabetes such as eye and kidney disease, heart attacks, stroke and even mental-health disorders.

The data will be displayed as line graph, bar chart and data table.

For health professionals in Alberta, they will, for the first time, have quick and easy access to a wealth of information.

Over the past 14 years, the occurrence of diabetes across Alberta has risen steadily and health-care providers are faced with the challenge of providing adequate services and care to meet this growing need.

"Based on our research, Type 2 diabetes is on the rise in older adult males and we can see that cardiovascular disease, heart attacks and strokes are the main causes of death," said Johnson. "Having the information at our fingertips, in a quick and sortable way, will provide so much benefit for health-care planning."

In fact, once the data is accessed, it can be easily exported for

presentations and reports. While the group is providing this website as a resource for the health-care system, the general public is also welcome to access it.

"A simple registration process and a how-to video makes using the tool easy," said Johnson.

While Johnson notes that, "all provinces contribute to a national diabetes surveillance system, but the Alberta Diabetes Surveillance System is an embellished version. The new site is leading the way in [diabetes](#) reporting and information sharing."

Provided by University of Alberta

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