

# Footing the bill for a 'silent' sickness

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QUT research indicated foot disease cost the Australian health system up to \$4.7 billion a year. Credit: Queensland University of Technology

The "silent burden" of foot disease afflicts one in ten hospital patients, costing taxpayers billions and filling nearly 5,000 hospital beds each night, according to QUT research.

The research, released on the back of World Diabetes Day (Monday November 14), analysed the conditions of 733 adult inpatients from five Australian hospitals on one day.

It found 10 per cent of patients had foot disease and half of those were hospitalised because of their disease. The study, the first to look at the burden of foot disease on the Australian health system, estimated patients with foot disease fill more than 4,800 hospital beds each night, costing up to \$4.7 billion a year.

The study, published in the *International Wound Journal*, also found a quarter of people in hospital have [diabetes](#), with one in five of those suffering foot disease.

QUT Senior Research Fellow and co-chair of Diabetic Foot Australia Peter Lazzarini said foot-related conditions were the primary reason for hospitalisation in 7.4 per cent of the sample.

"This indicates foot disease is one of the top 10 direct causes of hospitalisations in Australia," he said.

"The overall inpatient foot disease burden is much larger than thought previously and is similar in size to well-known medical conditions like [chronic kidney disease](#) and [cerebrovascular disease](#) so should receive similar attention.

"It is a silent burden that must be addressed because it is taking up thousands of beds each night and costing billions of dollars a year."

Mr Lazzarini said foot disease included foot ulcers, infections and ischemia (vascular disease).

While foot disease is often associated with diabetes, the study found fewer than half (46 per cent) of patients with foot disease had diabetes.

"The findings are a wake-up call to policy makers, clinicians and researchers to address the burden of foot disease in the same way as other leading causes of hospitalisation," Mr Lazzarini said.

"We need to consider adopting strategies used with success in other large, comparable diseases to reduce the considerable strain on the health system.

"Preventative foot disease treatment is primarily focused on [patients](#) with diabetes but we must ensure non-diabetic sufferers of foot disease receive the same care. This will prevent hospitalisations and bring to light this hidden burden."

**More information:** Peter A Lazzarini et al. The silent overall burden of foot disease in a representative hospitalised population, *International Wound Journal* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/iwj.12683](https://doi.org/10.1111/iwj.12683)

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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