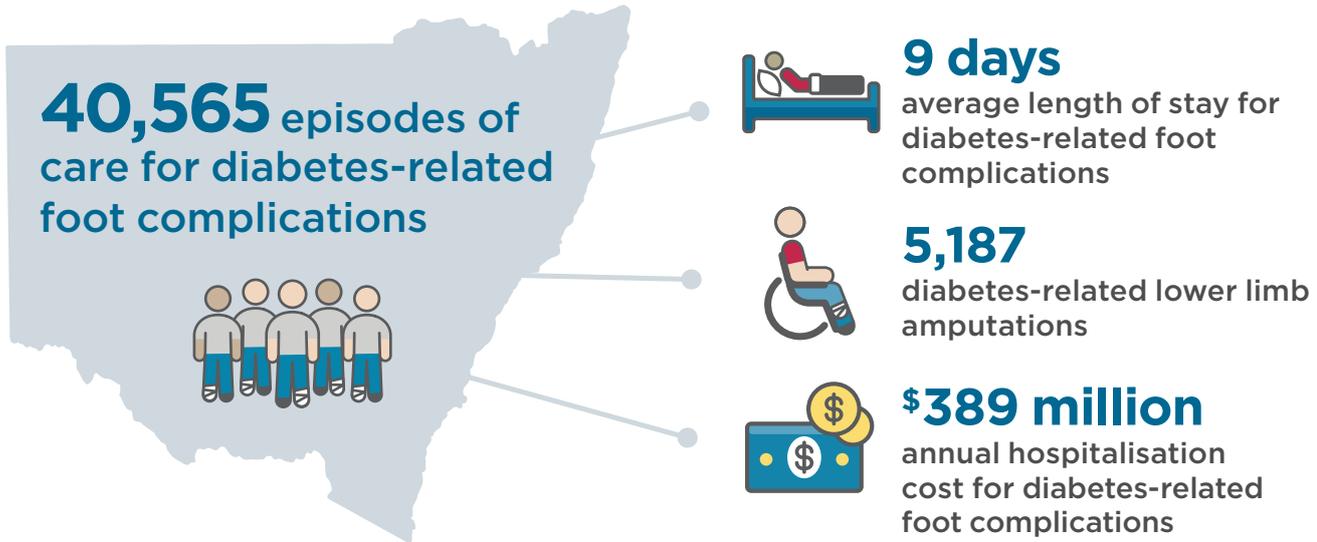


Improving access to high risk foot services

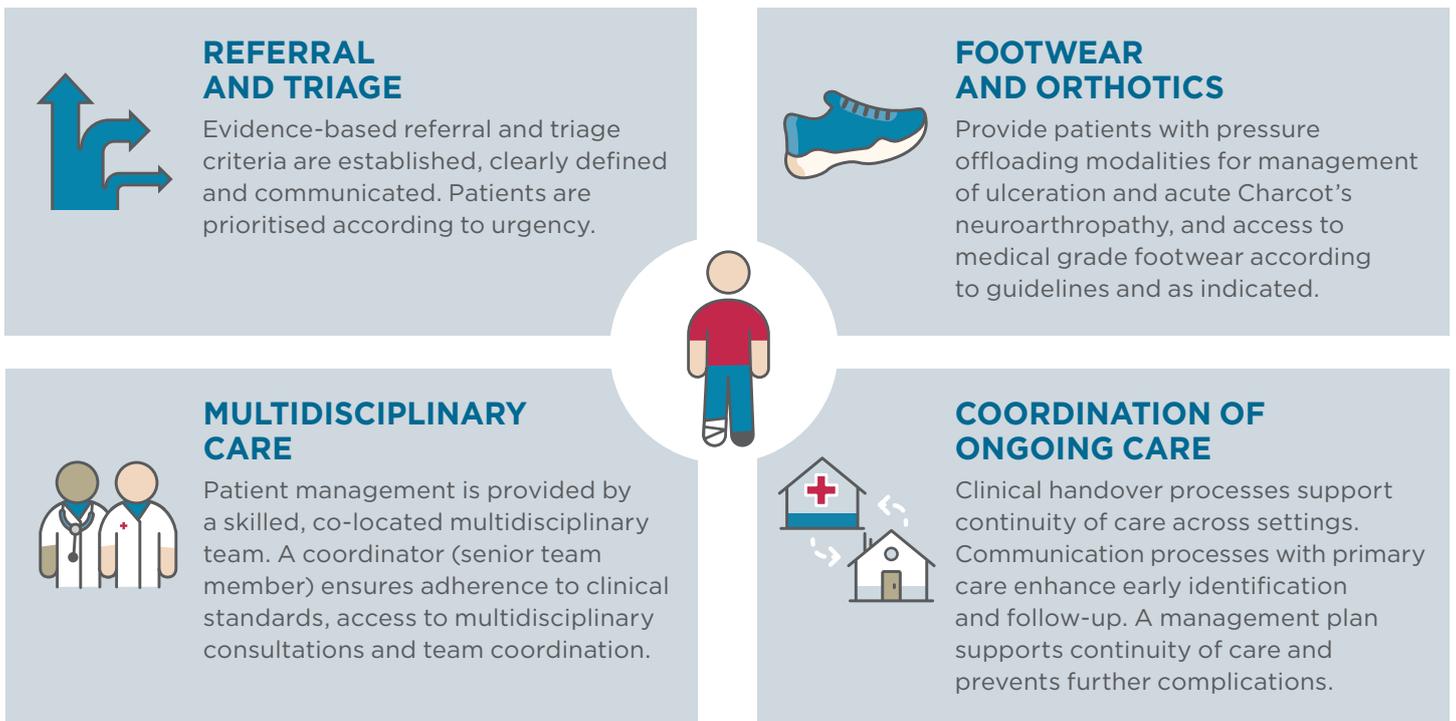
Clinical priorities

Foot ulceration is one of the leading causes of hospitalisation for people with diabetes, and in serious cases, can lead to amputation. Diabetes-related foot complications are serious and best managed by multidisciplinary high risk foot services.



Data source: HoPeD (Hospital Performance Dataset), NSW Ministry of Health

This overview summarises four key areas that ensure effective management of diabetes-related foot ulcers.



Compliance with the ACI *Standards for high risk foot services in NSW*¹ and National Association of Diabetes Centres (NDAC) *Collaborative interdisciplinary diabetes high risk foot services standards*² will ensure that people with diabetes-related foot complications are provided with best practice, evidence-based care.

Referral and triage

- Patients who have deep ulcers (probe to tendon, joint or bone), ulcers not reducing in size, impalpable foot pulses, ascending cellulitis, or known or suspected Charcot's neuroarthropathy are referred to high risk foot services.
- Triage involves the review of referral information by the clinic coordinator or a member of the clinical team. This occurs within one business day of receipt.
- Patients are prioritised according to urgency. Urgent cases are assessed on the same business day or referred to the emergency department. Urgent cases include: foot ulcers suspected to be deep, spreading cellulitis, critical limb ischaemia, or known/suspected Charcot's neuroarthropathy.
- Care pathways provide direct access to hospital care from high risk foot services, bypassing the emergency department.

Multidisciplinary care

Minimum staffing includes a senior physician, a senior podiatrist, and a nurse/credentialed diabetes educator. In rural services the role of senior physician may be fulfilled by an upskilled nurse practitioner with support from a senior physician.

Where clinically indicated, patients have access to required medical and surgical consultations, including for vascular, orthopaedic, infectious disease and referral for other appropriate investigations. Aboriginal people have access to Aboriginal health services.

Routine and ongoing education in high risk foot care is provided to all staff.

Footwear and orthotics

Patients should be provided with:

- pressure offloading to facilitate healing and reduce the risk of recurrence of foot complications
- access to timely prescription of footwear and footwear modifications and referral to orthotic and/or pedorthic services and EnableNSW
- user-friendly information and education about appropriate use of devices
- a discharge plan that outlines footwear needs and secondary prevention.



Coordination of ongoing care

The high risk foot service has discharge criteria and a related healthcare management pathway system. Strategies for the prevention of ulcer recurrence should be included.

Management plans are communicated to relevant health professionals involved in the patient's care, including the GP, the patient, their family and carers. This occurs:

- after the initial consultation, any new diagnosis or significant change in treatment, and at discharge
- in a timely manner (within five business days).

The service has a strong connection with GPs and the primary care system to support early intervention and maximise prevention. There is a shared care model or step-down clinic so that various providers (such as community health services, private podiatrists, or general practices) support patients post discharge.

Quality improvement

High risk foot services should collect the minimum dataset and develop key performance indicators to assess the safety and efficacy of clinical services, and to assist with resource allocation and service improvement.

Evidence

1. NSW Agency for Clinical Innovation. [Standards for High Risk Foot Services \(HRFS\) in NSW](#). 1st edition. Chatswood; ACI: 2014.

1. National Association of Diabetes Centres and Australian Diabetes Society. [NADC Collaborative Interdisciplinary Diabetes High Risk Foot Services \(HRFS\) Standards](#). 1st edition. NADC and ADS: 2018.