

A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a patterned top and a black smartwatch, looking out a window. Her hand is resting on her chin, and she has a thoughtful expression. The scene is lit with warm, golden light from the window.

Social Experiences of Living with Diabetes in Canada

A research report on stigma, judgement
and discrimination experienced
by those living with diabetes.

Introduction

Diabetes Canada is pleased to present the key findings from our first-of-a-kind national survey, conducted to understand the prevalence and impact of diabetes-related stigma on the social experiences of individuals living with diabetes. As part of Diabetes Canada's strategy to change the conversation around diabetes, this study was conducted to better understand the positive and negative social and psychological dynamics impacting those living with diabetes.

Methodology

The data presented in this report is based on responses collected from English-speaking participants from across Canada with type 1 diabetes or type 2 diabetes, self-reported, 18 years of age and above. Conducted between August 18 and November 15, 2023, the survey included 786 people with type 1 diabetes (T1D) and 1,013 people with type 2 diabetes (T2D).

786people living with
type 1 diabetes (T1D)**1,013**people living with
type 2 diabetes (T2D)

Report summary

Diabetes poses significant physical and emotional challenges that create worry for people when it comes to their future and the possibility of serious complications associated with the condition.

People with diabetes experience stigma, distress, challenges with support and negative impacts on their lives. The misconceptions, judgements and biases that they encounter can perpetuate a cycle of isolation and inequality.

When self-describing their lived experiences, people expressed mostly negative sentiments with a desire for greater understanding and empathy from others. There is a general belief that education and knowledge among the general population could help break down the prevailing stigma and discrimination around diabetes.

It is also important to recognize that the experiences related to stigma, discrimination and quality of life are not the same for all people with diabetes.



4
MILLION

**people have been diagnosed
with diabetes in Canada**

Source: Diabetes Canada, Canadian Diabetes Cost Model, 2023 Updates.

Stigma

People living with diabetes have been discriminated against, treated differently and experience blame and shame from others.

86% T1D

69% T2D

People have **experienced blame or shame** for having diabetes.



34% T1D

14% T2D

People with diabetes agree that they have been **discriminated against** because they have diabetes.

54% T1D

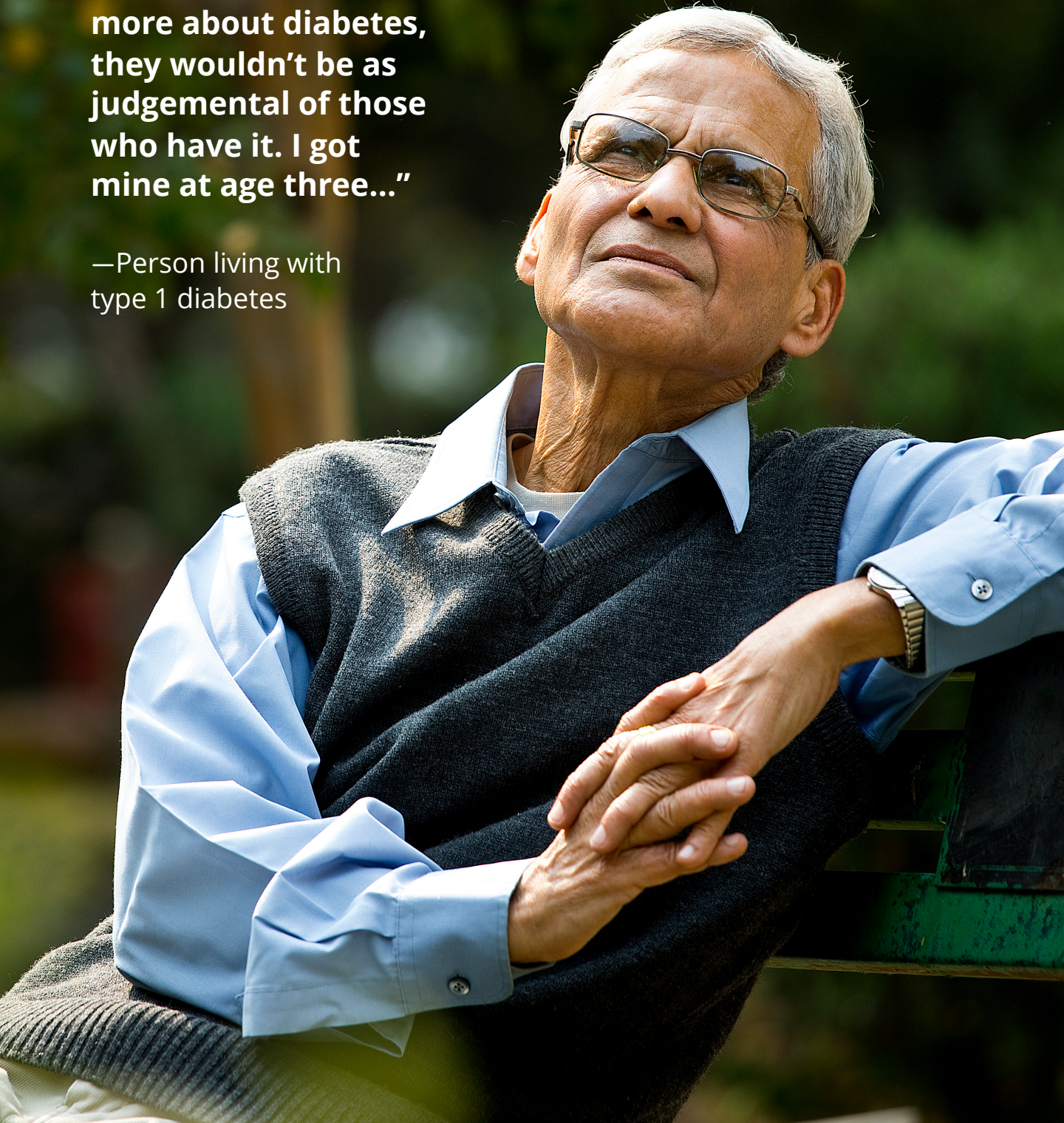
31% T2D

People with diabetes have been **treated differently** because of their diabetes.



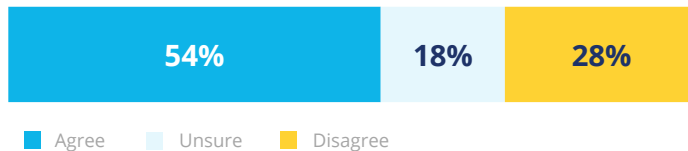
“ If the public knew more about diabetes, they wouldn’t be as judgemental of those who have it. I got mine at age three...”

—Person living with type 1 diabetes



Stigma

People living with diabetes must deal with unfair assumptions about what they can and cannot do, judgements if they consume sugary meals, and being blamed for having diabetes. Of those surveyed, many people living with **type 1 diabetes** agree that:



Some people assume that it is **my fault** I have diabetes (e.g. I ate too much sugar, I could have prevented it).



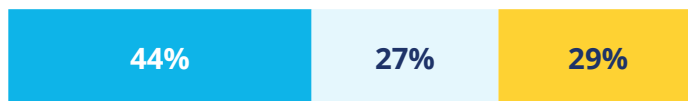
To avoid negative reactions, **I don't tell people** I have diabetes.



Some people make **unfair assumptions** about what I can and cannot do because of my diabetes.



Some people think that **I brought diabetes on myself.**



If I were to inject insulin in public, **people would think I was taking drugs.**



Because I have diabetes, some **people judge me if I eat sugary food or drinks** (e.g. cakes, candy soft drinks).



Some **people think I need insulin** because I haven't looked after myself.

Stigma

The feeling of blame and judgement is also felt among people with **type 2 diabetes**, alongside misconceptions about what people living with type 2 diabetes can and cannot do. Of those surveyed, many people living with **type 2 diabetes** agree that:



■ Agree ■ Unsure ■ Disagree

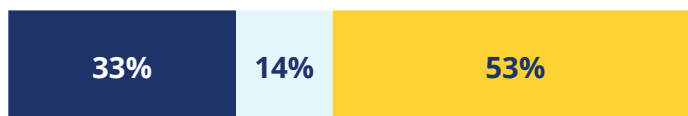
There is **blame and shame** surrounding diabetes.



Because I have diabetes, some people **assume** I must be overweight, or have been in the past.



Because I have diabetes, some people **judge me** for my food choices.



I **blame myself** for having diabetes.



I have been told that I **brought my diabetes on myself**.



There is a **negative stigma** about diabetes being a "lifestyle disease".

Diabetes distress

The emotional impact of diabetes means that many people experience distress tied to the challenges of living with and managing diabetes.

46%

of people with
type 1 diabetes have
experienced distress.

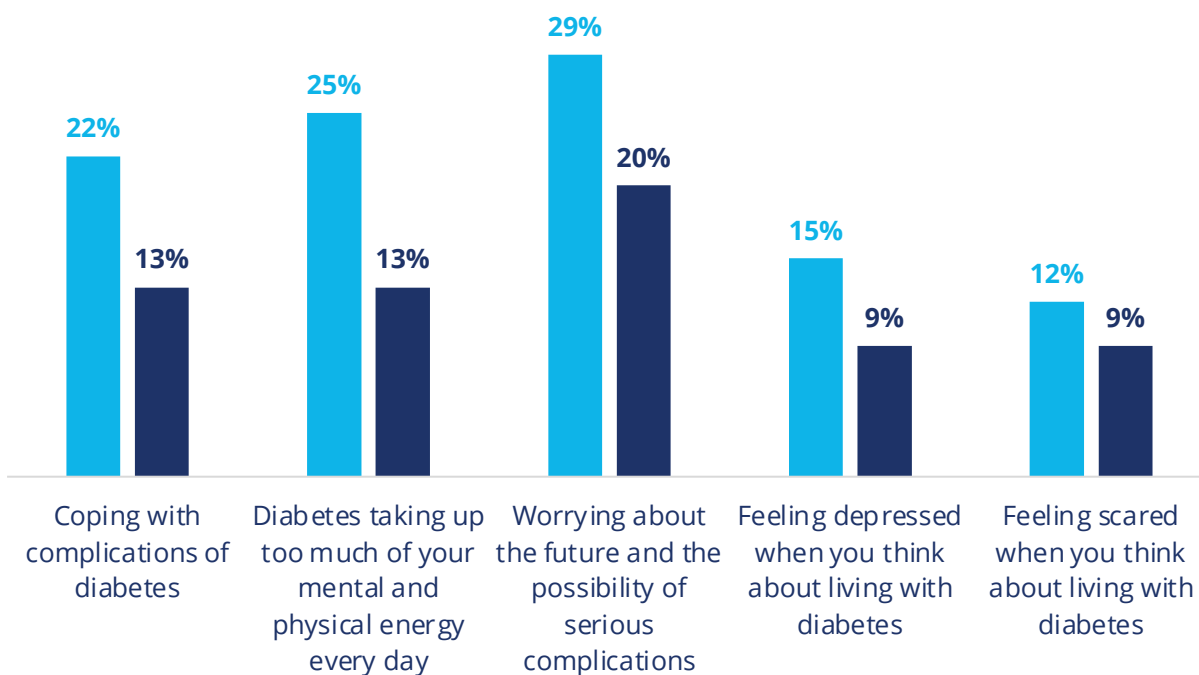
31%

of people with
type 2 diabetes have
experienced distress.



Distress associated with **diabetes** results from the following challenges:

■ Type 1 diabetes ■ Type 2 diabetes



Support

People with diabetes tend to refrain from asking for support, articulating their needs when it comes to diabetes management, or taking part in activities to improve their care.

60% Type 1 Diabetes
77% Type 2 Diabetes

Never or rarely **take part in activities in their community to improve care** for people with diabetes.



15% T1D
29% T2D

Never or rarely **seek out information** they need to manage their diabetes.

40% T1D
56% T2D

Never or rarely **ask for support** to help manage their diabetes when they need it.

19% T1D
31% T2D

Never or rarely **try out different ways to better manage** their diabetes.

44% T1D
68% T2D

Never or **rarely let people know how they can best support them** in managing their diabetes.





“ I suggest to anybody that if they have a friend or family member needing to talk, don’t try...‘fixing’. Often, I have just needed to be heard. My suggestion is just to ask, ‘How I can help? How can I support you?’”

—Person living with
type 1 diabetes

Quality of life

There are many factors of living with diabetes that impact quality of life beyond physical well-being. For people living with diabetes, the condition **negatively impacts**:



**Emotional
well-being**



**Freedom to eat as
much as you wish**



**Work or
studies**



**Relationship
with your family**



**Relationship
with your friends**



**Relationship
with your peers**



**Leisure
activities**



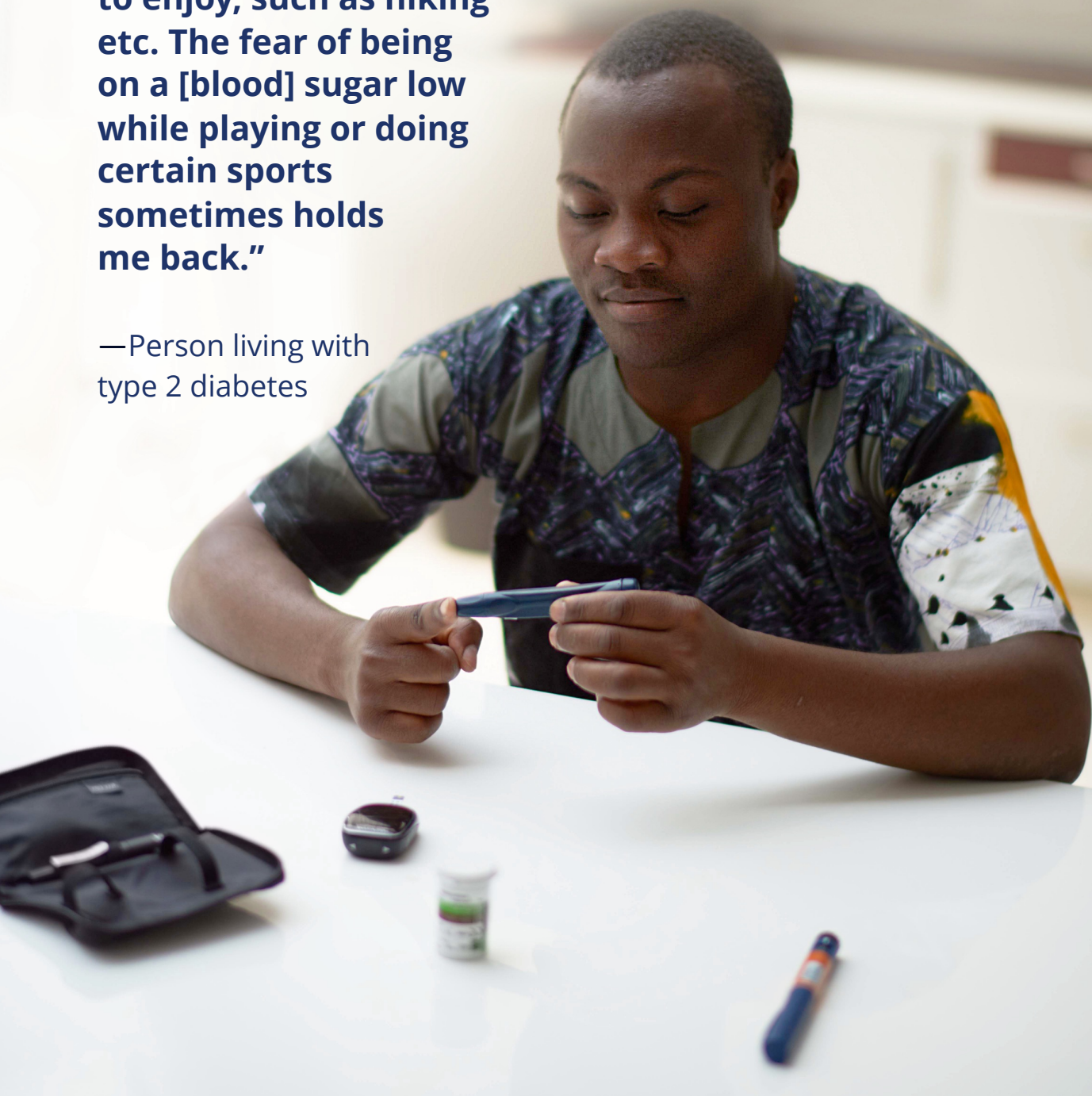
**Financial
situation**



**Physical
health**

“ I feel that diabetes has prevented me from doing things that I used to enjoy, such as hiking etc. The fear of being on a [blood] sugar low while playing or doing certain sports sometimes holds me back.”

—Person living with type 2 diabetes



What can we do?

We can all act right now to challenge diabetes-related stigma and make a real, positive difference for the more than four million people diagnosed with diabetes in Canada. **People living with diabetes are not to blame for their health condition.**

We can help increase support and reduce psychological distress with the goal of creating dramatically better health outcomes and a higher quality of life.

Whether the person living with diabetes is you, a loved one, colleague or patient, we all have an important role to play. It starts with learning the facts, challenging myths, and shining a light on this often-misunderstood condition.

Diabetes Canada wants to improve the quality of life for every person living with diabetes and this includes promoting the changing of minds, words and actions to be more positive. **Let's reimagine a world with more compassion, empathy and better health outcomes for people living with diabetes, and then let's create it together.**

Learn more about how at diabetes.ca/changetheconversation



A close-up photograph of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a green short-sleeved shirt, holding a sleeping baby. The woman has a glucose monitor attached to her upper arm. The baby is wearing an orange long-sleeved shirt and is sleeping peacefully. The background is a dark, textured surface.

**Education.
Understanding.
Empathy.**

About Diabetes Canada

Diabetes Canada is the nation's most trusted provider of diabetes education, research, resources, and services. Since 1953, we've helped millions of Canadians affected by diabetes understand, manage the condition and combat complications.

A world free of the effects of diabetes is Diabetes Canada's vision. That's why we're working together to improve the quality of life of people living with diabetes. We're sharing knowledge and creating connections for individuals and the health-care professionals who care for them; advocating through public policy; and funding research to improve treatments and find a cure to end diabetes.

Improving the quality of life for people with diabetes is at the heart of Diabetes Canada's commitment to all Canadians diagnosed with this chronic health condition. That means connecting children and youth with type 1 diabetes through Diabetes Canada's D-Camps; providing healthcare professionals and people with diabetes with expert information that improves their care and self-management; assisting researchers working on leading-edge treatments; and advocating on behalf of those with diabetes for equity, improved access to supplies and more.

This research report was developed by Environics Research, one of Canada's leading custom research and consulting firms, with a reputation for integrity, accuracy and insight. Founded in 1970 and wholly Canadian-owned, Environics Research offers a broad array of research, consulting and communications services, from traditional public opinion polling and market research, to advanced studies of human values and social change.

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