

# Improving Footcare in Thanet

## A collaborative project between healthcare professionals in Thanet and Diabetes UK (2023/24)

### About Us



This project has been a collaboration between healthcare professionals working within the diabetes footcare pathway in Thanet, Kent and people living with diabetes, and Diabetes UK.

### The Challenge



Thanet has been identified as a priority area due to having some of the highest diabetes related amputation rates nationally.

### Our Goal:

The project group decided to take a prevention focus and agreed upon a goal that tackled some of the upstream factors:

**All people living with diabetes and healthcare professionals in Thanet will have the knowledge of diabetes foot problems and will be utilising the correct support by the end of 2025.**

### The Approach



#### Co-production and systems thinking

Over eight workshops, we brought together insights from a multi-disciplinary group of Health Care Professionals (HCPs), People living with diabetes (PLWD), and their carers to understand the root cause of the current challenges and to unlock opportunities for positive and lasting change that will improve footcare for PLWD.

#### Our methods

Using a systems thinking approach we set out to understand the context of footcare in Thanet and gain insights by:

- Creating a shared understanding of the system by mapping the footcare pathway.

- Challenging assumptions by mapping patient journeys including the thoughts, actions and emotions of the journey that leads to high-risk foot problems and amputations.
- Identifying key problem areas in the system.
- Developing prototypes of concepts for change that could contribute to key shifts in the problem areas to improve foot care.
- Getting feedback about these prototypes from across the system, particularly involving those who would be impacted.

### Insights



Through desktop research, interviews, focus groups, and workshops the group gained a range of insights from which five key problem areas emerged.

#### Five Key Problems:

1. There is limited awareness among HCPs of existing resources to support PLWD.
2. One off education courses (even when accessed) are insufficient to convey the seriousness of foot issues, the care skills required or warning signs to PLWD.
3. There is a lack of clarity among HCPs about the podiatry self-referral pathway.
4. There is not enough time or emphasis placed on diabetes and footcare education for healthcare professionals.
5. People living with diabetes often feel isolated and need more support options in between regular healthcare appointments.

## Recommendations

For each problem area we have developed recommendations and an accompanying suite of actions that could be taken by either the organisational management or the individual healthcare professional (or both).

### Recommendations:

- ✓ Commit to increasing diabetes and footcare knowledge, confidence, and skills.
- ✓ Use all touch points with PLWD to increase awareness about the seriousness of diabetes and footcare issues & prevention.
- ✓ Engage with and make already developed resources easily available when and where they are needed.
- ✓ Set up environments and utilise practice channels to maximise opportunities to communicate about diabetes and footcare.
- ✓ Increase understanding of, and access to the self-referral pathway among HCPs.
- ✓ Use all touch points with PLWD to increase awareness about the seriousness of diabetes and footcare issues & prevention.
- ✓ Provide regular opportunities for and encourage staff to engage in diabetes focused training.

## What has been done so far?

A range of activity occurred to support the implementation of these recommendations and address the identified problem areas, including:

- Creation of a bespoke Thanet footcare assessment protocol by a local HCP to support the management of diabetes and foot care problems.

- Development of competency assessment tool to increase the standardisation of foot checks delivery across Thanet.
- Increased access to self-referral form making it available to download on the [East Kent Podiatry home page](#).
- Training evening where 18 HCAs & Nurses were upskilled in basic footcare.
- Resource packs were distributed to each of the GP clinics. These packs included [ACT NOW posters](#), Diabetes UK [foot check booklets](#), flyers to local support groups, information prescriptions, the protocol and foot check competency. It also contained the recommendations and resources lists so practices were made aware as to how they could get involved and how these packs could support them.

## Key Learnings

1. Gathering insights from both PLWD and HCPs on the ground is essential. Hearing from these perspectives identified some assumptions that were being held and shaped the direction of the project.
2. There are many shared goals between primary, secondary and community care but projects like this shouldn't underestimate the amount of time required to develop the relationships needed to progress forward.
3. There is often a range of resources already created and available that can be used for little to no additional cost.

## What's Next?



The ICB and HCPs involved in this project group will continue to monitor amputation rates and see whether these initiatives make a difference over the long term. Insights from this project can be used in future footcare and diabetes service development.