

# Special Diabetes Program for Indians: Reducing Lower Extremity Amputations

With support from the *Special Diabetes Program for Indians*, facilities in the Indian health system are implementing foot care interventions that, when introduced system-wide, have the potential to cut the risk for lower extremity (below the knee) amputations significantly.

- ❖ A clinical study in one region of the Indian Health Service (IHS), the Bemidji Area IHS, showed that the use of foot care guidelines decreased amputation rates by 50%.
- ❖ The same study showed that additional vascular surgery outreach services and the use of specialty shoes further reduced the amputation rate by half, resulting in **an overall reduction in amputations of 75%**.
- ❖ The Bemidji Area IHS and Alaska Area IHS have served as leaders in developing and distributing diabetes foot care practice guidelines for the Indian health system.



## Why is this important?

- ❖ More than half of all lower extremity amputations in the United States occur in people with diabetes.
- ❖ People with diabetes are at risk for foot injuries due to numbness caused by diabetes-related nerve damage and low blood flow to the legs and feet. The most serious injury is a foot ulcer, which is at very high risk of becoming infected. Foot ulcers that do not heal are a frequent cause of amputation in people with diabetes.
- ❖ Approximately 75% of lower extremity amputations due to diabetes can be prevented through the use of appropriate diabetes care practices, minor surgery, and low-tech strategies, such as foot and nail care, shoe inserts, and specialty shoes.

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