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# The path to modernize Ontario public coverage for intermittent catheters and related supplies



SPINAL CORD INJURY ONTARIO  
LÉSIONS MÉDULLAIRES ONTARIO







# Executive summary



This policy report presents a comprehensive and compelling case to modernize public coverage for those whose bladder health is managed through intermittent catheters and related supplies.

Individuals with a neurological condition, including a spinal cord injury (SCI), may not be able to empty their bladder on their own which can lead to chronic urinary retention and serious health problems such as bladder damage or kidney disease.

To prevent these problems from happening a catheter is used up to five times a day to drain the bladder, a process called intermittent catheterization. This represents a significant change to how a basic bodily function is managed, and for some people can be overwhelming. The procedure leads to challenges in mental health, relationships, intimacy, body image and self-esteem. Service providers, clinicians, and government must build the right systems for people to live a happy and healthy and productive life as an intermittent catheter user.

To support a person's ability to access enough intermittent catheters, a modern public coverage model is needed. This report helps to visualize a new streamlined program to improve patient access.

The recommendations in this Policy Report build upon examining the access and affordability of intermittent catheters from the disputed 2019 Health Technology Assessment by Health Quality Ontario (HQA) on *Intermittent Catheters for Chronic Urinary Retention*.<sup>1</sup> Users of intermittent catheters emphasize that the choice of product is critical. Through a #pee4free Queen's Park day in 2018, Spinal Cord Injury Ontario (SCIO) was invited to develop a comprehensive review with recommendations to modernize public coverage in Ontario. We are responding to that request.

There is a misconception that once a person has a disability, all supplies will be covered. Access to medical supplies, including urinary catheters, is confusing and expensive. The plethora of funding programs across the province are not integrated. The pandemic of 2020 has impacted all aspects of life in Ontario, especially those with spinal cord injuries with limited mobility. This document includes insights from the community on the impacts of COVID-19, which exacerbated issues in the accessibility

of intermittent catheters, related supplies and caregiver shortages. What happens in Toronto is vastly different from people in northern Ontario communities, so the needs of Indigenous peoples and rural communities are also imperative.

People don't catheterize themselves in controlled environments. To contribute to society and maintain mental health, these members of our population must catheterize in public spaces, on trains, planes, in our academic institutions, community centres and in the workplace. Narratives at the end of the report reflect real-life situations and the criticality of addressing four themes:

- the importance of choice;
- the accessibility and affordability to supplies impacts the health of the province;
- bladder health is mental health; and
- the pandemic left many paralyzed and powerless.

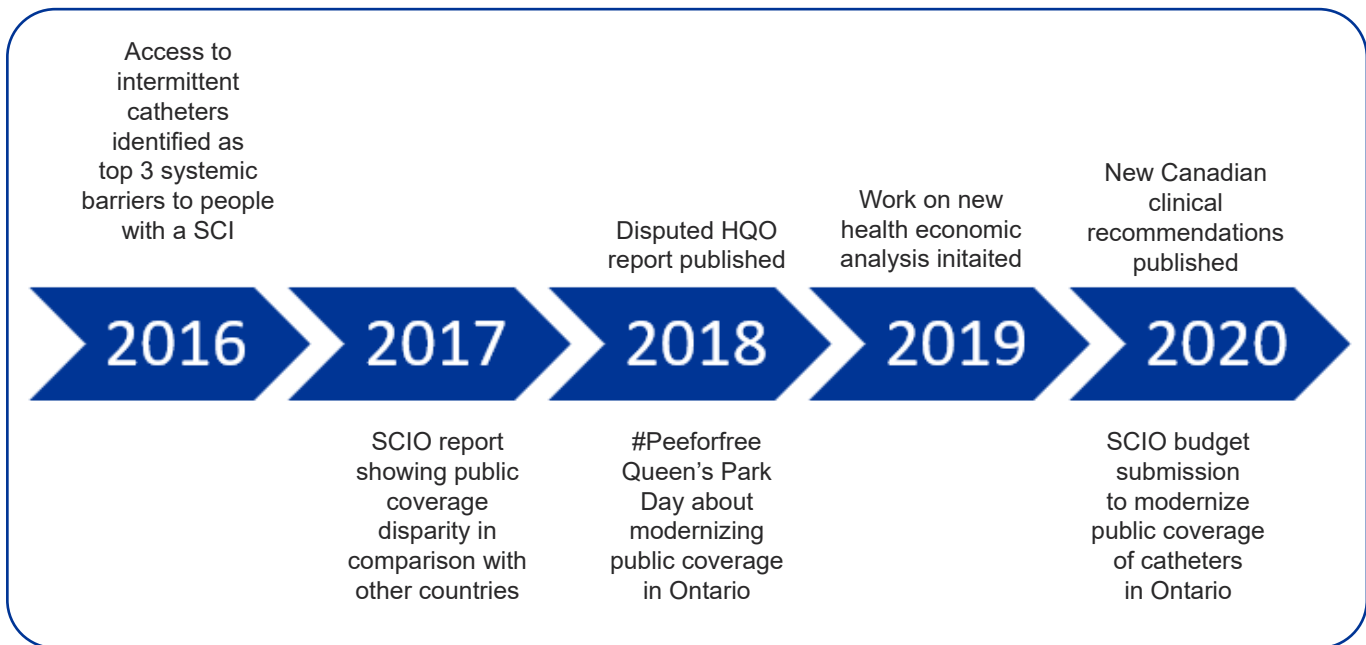
A single-use medical device is designed, manufactured and approved for sale by Health Canada to be used once on a single patient

and then to be discarded. The Canadian Urological Association (CUA), nursing associations and industry unite that it is inappropriate for the health system to necessitate intermittent catheter users to clean and reuse a single-use medical device.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

What is immediately apparent is that these programs have not been designed with people at the centre in the Province of Ontario. Different programs managed by different government agencies are layered one upon another.

A summary of nine critical recommendations is presented for the Government of Ontario to work with the stakeholders to modernize public coverage to reduce red tape, improve procurement and provide people with what they need; simply and efficiently. The consequences of doing nothing are far more severe to a person's health and the economy when the system of services available for intermittent catheters is inefficient.

SCIO Steering Committee  
**February 2021**



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