

Failure to detect type 2 diabetes early costing \$700 million per year

Diabetes Australia has warned that failure to implement a comprehensive national type 2 diabetes early detection program could be costing the Australian health system more than \$700 million each year.

Diabetes Australia is calling for emergency departments and GP clinics across Australia to conduct more routine screening in a bid to diagnose up to 500,000 Australians who may currently have silent, undiagnosed type 2 diabetes.

People can have type 2 diabetes for up to seven years before it is diagnosed and in that time many people will begin to develop debilitating complications including heart attacks and strokes, eye damage and blindness, foot ulcers and limb amputation, and kidney damage. In many cases, complications can be prevented with early detection and optimal treatment.

New figures were released today at Blacktown Hospital, one of Australia's diabetes hotspots, where an innovative diabetes screening program has found that about half of people being screened in the emergency department and other settings are found to have either prediabetes or type 2 diabetes – much worse than experts previously believed.

Today marks the start of National Diabetes Week (8 July – 14 July) and the launch of a new Diabetes Australia's *It's About Time* campaign.

Diabetes Australia CEO Professor Greg Johnson urged Governments to take action now to ensure the earlier detection of type 2 diabetes - before people develop complications.

“International evidence has found that early detection and optimal treatment could save as much as \$1,415 per person per year,” Diabetes Australia CEO Professor Greg Johnson said.

“With an estimated 500,000 Australians having silent, undiagnosed type 2 diabetes that could translate to savings of more than \$700 million for the Australian health system each year.

“Early detection and early treatment is likely to provide lasting health benefits to people with type 2 diabetes.

“Systematic early detection of type 2 diabetes is inexpensive and can be rolled out easily. It's about time we did so.

“We are calling for the HbA1c test to be incorporated with other blood tests in emergency departments and other times when doctors are ordering a range of blood

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tests. An HbA1c blood test measures long-term blood glucose levels and is used for the detection and subsequent monitoring of diabetes.

The innovative approach at Blacktown Hospital where Dr Glen Maberly has led the way in early detection of previously undiagnosed, silent type 2 diabetes is a great example of what is possible, at low cost.

“We knew the diabetes problem in western Sydney was serious, but our proactive detection has revealed it is much worse than we first thought,” Dr Maberly said.

Dr Maberly’s team initially coordinated the detection of patients presenting to Emergency Departments (EDs) at Blacktown and Mt Druitt hospitals. Under the program, patients presenting for other conditions and who needed blood tests, were also checked for type 2 diabetes using the HbA1c blood test.

Of the 48,000 patients checked in EDs, 30 per cent were likely to have pre-diabetes, while 17 per cent were likely to have type 2 diabetes.

In the second phase, supported by Western Sydney Primary Health Network (PHN), 11 GPs across western Sydney did diabetes tests on patients who were having blood tests for other problems.

“The results from the GP checks for type 2 diabetes were alarming. Of the nearly 6,000 people tested, 26 per cent were found to have pre-diabetes, while 17 per cent were likely to have type 2 diabetes,” Professor Maberly said.

Diabetes NSW & ACT CEO Sturt Eastwood said early diagnosis is critical to reducing the likelihood and impact of diabetes-related complications.

“People can live with type 2 diabetes for up to seven years before being diagnosed and in that time life-threatening health problems can develop,” Mr Eastwood said.

“The earlier people are diagnosed, the earlier they can get the right treatment, which will reduce their risk of developing diabetes-related complications including limb amputation, blindness, kidney failure and heart disease.

“It’s about reducing the time people have undiagnosed, silent type 2 diabetes.”

For more information, including campaign videos and other sources please visit itsabouttime.org.au

Diabetes Australia is the national body for people affected by all types of diabetes and those at risk. Diabetes Australia is committed to reducing the impact of diabetes. We work in partnership with diabetes health professionals, researchers and the community to minimise the impact of diabetes.

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