

**\*\*\*STRICTLY EMBARGOED – 5am 14 July 2019\*\*\***

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## **Time's up – we have to act on diabetes to save lives and save our hospitals**

Diabetes Australia today issued a wakeup call about the diabetes epidemic which is overwhelming Australia's hospitals after a new study found that people with diabetes accounted for around one-third of all hospitalisations.

A recent study at Austin Health, a major tertiary health service in Melbourne's north-east, found that 34% of patients had diabetes. Surprisingly, 5% of these people had silent, undiagnosed type 2 diabetes that was only detected after they were admitted to hospital.

Diabetes Australia CEO Professor Greg Johnson said Australia has to act now to improve early detection of diabetes and reduce the very high rate of diabetes-related admissions to Australia's hospitals.

"Diabetes will cripple our health system unless we take urgent, comprehensive action and that's why we are saying 'It's About Time' people get checked for type 2 diabetes early, and 'It's About Time' our health system got serious about reducing the high rate of hospital admissions for diabetes," Professor Johnson said.

"Every year diabetes is associated with more than one million hospitalisations but it doesn't have to be like this. Earlier detection of type 2 diabetes, and optimal early treatment can reduce the risk of people developing diabetes-related complications, which account for many of these hospitalisations, by up to 37%."

Diabetes Australia's warning comes on the back of new research which has revealed a worrying level of community antipathy towards type 2 diabetes. The research found:

- 62% of people aged 40+ were not concerned about developing type 2 diabetes *despite the fact that 2 million Australians are at high risk*
- type 2 diabetes was rated as potentially having the least impact on a person's health when compared to a range of other health conditions related to diabetes (blindness, having a limb amputated, heart attack and kidney failure) *despite diabetes being a leading cause of all of these other health problems*
- a majority of people ranked type 2 diabetes as least important when planning for the future (compared to having enough money, meaningful relationship with partner, freedom to travel etc.) *despite the fact that type 2 diabetes can have a major impact on a person's entire life.*

The 'It's About Time' campaign launched for National Diabetes Week (14-20 July) is about encouraging early detection and early, optimal treatment of type 2 diabetes which the evidence shows can produce health benefits for people and prevent hospitalisations.

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# MEDIA RELEASE



“An estimated 500,000 Australians are living with silent, undiagnosed type 2 diabetes - but it can be doing damage to their bodies and many will only be diagnosed late - when a diabetes complication such as eye damage or heart trouble impacts their lives,” said Prof Johnson.

“Our research shows many people underestimate the seriousness of type 2 diabetes despite the fact that it is the leading cause of blindness in working age Australians, a leading cause of limb amputations, and a leading cause of both kidney failure and heart attacks.

Professor Johnson applauded Austin Health for its approach to detecting diabetes and encouraged other hospitals and health services to adopt similar practices.

“Systematic screening programs for diabetes in our hospital emergency departments and in the wards is a very easy way to find undiagnosed diabetes.

“In western Sydney, Professor Glen Maberly and his team have lead the way with a program incorporating systematic detection into emergency departments and some local GP clinics and found that almost 50 per cent of people tested had diabetes or pre-diabetes – including a significant number of people with previously silent, undiagnosed type 2 diabetes.”

Associate Professor Elif Ekinci, Director of Diabetes at Austin Health, said it was important hospitals were proactive about detecting diabetes.

“Diabetes can have a huge impact on person’s treatment in hospital regardless of the reason for admission - so it is important we know if they have diabetes so we can adjust their treatment accordingly,” Professor Ekinci said.

“What we have done at Austin Health isn’t complex – we just added another blood test to the variety of blood tests people are getting – but it could significantly improve the health outcomes of the individual and help us to provide better care for our patients.

“I am encouraging all hospitals around Australia to get proactive about detecting diabetes.”

Melbourne man John Pahos, aged 58, was one of the hundreds of thousands of Australians living with silent, undiagnosed type 2 diabetes.

“I was admitted to hospital with a bowel issue last August and as part of Austin Health’s routine checks they discovered I had type 2 diabetes,” John said.

“I didn’t the slightest idea that I could have type 2 diabetes. I’ve been the same weight for fifteen years, I walk 15,000 steps-a-day and I generally watch what I eat.

“My message to everyone is - get checked. You think it can’t happen to you - but it can. Importantly, once you are diagnosed you can start managing the condition and help prevent the serious complications.”

For more information about the campaign or to do a type 2 diabetes risk check visit [www.itsabouttime.org.au](http://www.itsabouttime.org.au)

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