



A call to action



The global 'Diabetes Action Now' programme by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Diabetes Federation (IDF)

New estimates suggest that diabetes is a bigger killer than AIDS. 3.2 million deaths are attributable to diabetes every year – equivalent to six deaths every minute. These alarming figures are accompanied by a call to action from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), with the launch of the global 'Diabetes Action Now' programme.

In developed countries, diabetes mainly afflicts the over-65s. In developing countries however, it is people in the middle, productive years of their lives who are particularly affected by diabetes. At least one in ten deaths in adults aged 35 to 64 in developing countries is attributable to diabetes, and in some countries the figure is as high as one in five.

The new estimates are three times higher than previous calculations, indicating an urgent need to raise awareness of diabetes and provide improved diabetes care, particularly in low- and middle-income countries and communities.

“The world is facing a growing diabetes epidemic of potentially devastating proportions. Its impact will be felt most severely in developing

countries, and a global effort to fight diabetes is vital,” says Professor Pierre Lefèbvre, President of the International Diabetes Federation and Chairman of the World Diabetes Foundation.

Diabetes Action Now

Diabetes Action Now is a joint initiative of the World Health Organization and the International Diabetes Federation. The programme has been launched to stimulate and support the adoption of effective measures for the surveillance, prevention and control of diabetes. A key aim of the programme is to achieve a substantial increase in awareness of the importance of diabetes, particularly among health policymakers at international and national level.

Diabetes Action Now is supported by a World Diabetes Foundation grant to the International Diabetes Federation and WHO. The initial funding is for three years, but it is expected that additional funds will be made available to maintain the programme for a longer period.

The Diabetes Action Now programme will focus on five major areas of activity for the first three years:

- 1) increasing awareness of diabetes, its complications and prevention, particularly among health policymakers at international and national level
- 2) collecting and disseminating new knowledge of the awareness of diabetes and its economic impact in low- and middle-income countries
- 3) producing and disseminating a new scientifically based review of the prevention of diabetes and its complications – a much-needed update of the 1994 WHO technical report on the prevention of diabetes
- 4) producing up-to-date practical guidance for policymakers in low- and middle-income countries on the content, structure and implementation of national diabetes programmes
- 5) developing a web-based resource for policymakers to support the implementation of national diabetes programmes.

“The implementation of national diabetes programmes is central to avoid the impending threat of a global diabetes epidemic. Three quarters of the deaths among people with diabetes aged under 35 years are due to their general health condition: 50-80% from cardiovascular disease. With simple lifestyle adjustments such as a healthy diet and physical activity

we can, however, ensure people with diabetes a full and healthy life,” says Pierre Lefèbvre, and underlines that type 2 diabetes accounts for more than 90% of all cases of diabetes. Many cases could therefore be prevented through lifestyle interventions.

What is diabetes?

Type 1 diabetes

People with this type of diabetes produce very little or no insulin. They require daily injections of insulin to survive. Common symptoms include excessive thirst, constant hunger, excessive urination, weight loss for no reason, rapid, hard breathing, visual disturbances, drowsiness or exhaustion.

Type 2 diabetes

people with this type of diabetes cannot use insulin effectively. Sometimes they can manage their condition with lifestyle measures alone but oral drugs, and less frequently insulin, are often required in order to achieve good metabolic control. Many have no symptoms and are only diagnosed many years after onset.

Source: the WHO-IDF booklet Diabetes Action Now

Diabetes – who is at risk?

Type 1 diabetes

- Although the onset of type 1 diabetes is typically in childhood, it also occurs in adults. People with a strong family history of type 1 diabetes are at increased risk.

Type 2 diabetes

- Adults and children who are overweight or obese and are physically inactive
- Certain ethnic groups (higher rates of type 2 diabetes are reported in people of Asian and African origin and in indigenous peoples of the Americas and Australasia)
- Individuals with a family history of diabetes
- Women who have had gestational diabetes mellitus (who developed diabetes during pregnancy) are at greater risk of type 2 diabetes later in life.

Source: the WHO-IDF booklet Diabetes Action Now



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