



WORLD **DIABETES** FOUNDATION

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

Diabetes in the developing world

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Today, 80% of the 246 million people living with diabetes live in the low- and middle- income countries of the world¹.

- The prevalence of diabetes has reached epidemic proportions. WHO predicts that developing countries will bear the brunt of this epidemic in the 21st century, with approximately 80% of all new cases of diabetes expected to appear in the developing nations².
- Although infectious diseases still constitute the leading cause of mortality and morbidity in developing countries, WHO predicts that non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases will become the world's main disablers and killers within the next 25 years³.
- The number of people with diabetes worldwide is expected to rise to 380 million in 2025. 304 million, 80%, will be living in developing countries, where health resources are needed to combat both contagious and chronic diseases. The greatest increase of all (102%) is expected to be in South and Central America⁴.
- Type 2 diabetes accounts for more than 95% of all diabetes cases in the developing world⁵.

Lack of sufficient diagnosis and treatment

- Worldwide, half of all people with diabetes are diagnosed. In developing countries less than half are aware of their condition; in Tanzania, rural India, Nepal, Tonga and China only 20-25% of all people with diabetes have been diagnosed. Without timely diagnoses and adequate treatment, complications and morbidity from diabetes rise exponentially⁶.
- Since type 2 diabetes often remains undiagnosed for several years, a significant number of people already have retinopathy and other complications at the time of diagnosis of diabetes. Retinopathy remains an important cause of visual loss in the developed world⁷.
- The risk of leg amputation, heart disease and stroke are all significantly higher for people with diabetes, e. g. are people with diabetes 15 to 40 times more likely to require a lower limb amputation compared to the general population. Diabetes is responsible for more than 1 million amputations each year⁸.



- In some cases indispensable for survival, and in others necessary to maintain normal blood sugar levels, insulin remains under utilised in many developing countries. A survey revealed that only 3% of people with diabetes in developed countries are treated with the drug, compared to 13% in the developing world. Culturally based misconceptions and chronic shortages are just some of the reasons for this disparity⁹.
- The diabetes pandemic, which consists primarily of Type 2 diabetes, has evolved in association with rapid cultural changes, aging populations, increasing urbanisation, dietary changes, decreased physical activity and other unhealthy lifestyles and behavioural patterns. Without effective prevention and control programmes, the incidence of diabetes will continue to rise globally.
- It may seem strange that the developing world, which is often associated with hunger and inadequate nutrition for children is now experiencing an epidemic in type 2 diabetes, a disease related to wealth and unhealthy lifestyle. This can be explained with the high degree of urbanisation in some countries like e.g. India that have made people adapt the lifestyle from the industrial countries causing diseases such as diabetes related to this new lifestyle. It is also a fact that some people genetically have a higher risk of developing diabetes and combined with great changes in lifestyle this risk has turned to reality for many people in those countries.

Diabetes costs – a burden for families and society

- Because of the chronic nature of the disease, the severity of its complications and the means required controlling them, diabetes is a costly disease. Mechanisms for financing health care are non-existent in most developing countries and health costs therefore typically represent out-of-pocket expenditure. According to WHO, 80% of people in developing countries pay directly for some or all of their own medicine¹⁰. In many instances, the choice is between health care and food or clothing, and such financial constraints inevitably result in under-consumption of health care services.
- The world suffers huge losses on form of foregone economic growth as a result of diabetes. Losses arise from the premature death and disability that untreated diabetes causes¹¹.
- In the poorest countries, people with diabetes and their families bear almost the whole cost of whatever medical care they can afford. In India for example, the poorest persons with diabetes spend an average of 25% of their total income on private care¹².
- In developing countries, the prevailing poverty, ignorance, illiteracy and poor health consciousness further adds to the problem. Those who cannot afford or do not have access to even bare minimum healthcare facilities are likely to be



diagnosed late and suffer from diabetes related complications (because of delay in diagnosis and/or improper treatment). Furthermore, many people with Type 1 (i.e. insulin dependent) diabetes die before they are diagnosed, or soon after diagnosis, due to inadequate access to treatment.

General facts on health care in the developing world

- The developing world carries 90% of this world's total disease burden, yet benefits from only 10% of global health resources¹³.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that one-third of the world population still lacks regular access to essential drugs, and this figure rises to over 50% in the least developed parts of Africa and Asia¹⁴. Barriers to healthcare access in developing countries include social and political factors, such as civil conflicts, lack of healthcare and education infrastructures and shortage of financial resources.

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The World Diabetes Foundation

World Diabetes Foundation is dedicated to supporting prevention and treatment of diabetes in the developing world through funding of sustainable projects. The World Diabetes Foundation creates partnerships and acts as a catalyst to help others do more. The Foundation strives to educate and advocate globally in an effort to create awareness, care and relief to those impacted by diabetes.

The World Diabetes Foundation has funded 164 projects to date in 80 countries with a total portfolio of USD 170.6 million of which USD 54.7 million are donated by the Foundation. The projects funded by the WDF will in the coming 3-4 years potentially influence the diabetes treatment, prevention and awareness efforts of 64.8 million people directly in the developing countries.

The World Diabetes Foundation was established in 2002 through a commitment of 1.225 Billion Danish kroner (USD 255 Million) to be allocated over the period; 2002-2017 by Novo Nordisk A/S. The Foundation is registered as an independent trust and governed by a board of six experts in the field of diabetes, access to health, and development assistance.

For further information please visit our website: www.worlddiabetesfoundation.org

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