

## All EYES ON DIABETES for World Diabetes Day

**Wednesday 9 November 2016:** Diabetes Victoria is celebrating this year's World Diabetes Day (Monday 14 November) by joining the international 'Blue Monument Challenge'. In Melbourne, the Royal Exhibition Building will be lit up in blue as a testimony to the worldwide effort to raise awareness for diabetes and to engage the global diabetes community.

The theme for World Diabetes Day 2016 is 'Eyes on diabetes', promoting the importance of screening for diabetes and diabetes complications. Diabetes Victoria has chosen to focus on eye health to highlight these important issues.

Diabetic retinopathy remains the leading cause of blindness in working-age Australians and a major cause of vision loss among older Australians. The good news is that, with optimal management of diabetes, and with regular eye tests and timely treatment when recommended, almost all vision loss due to diabetes can be prevented.

"If diabetes was a country, it would be the world's third largest," says Diabetes Victoria CEO Craig Bennett. "Each year, more and more people live with this condition, which can result in life-changing complications."

In Australia, around 1.7 million people are living with diabetes and a further 280 develop diabetes every day.

Every day, more than 70 people in Victoria are diagnosed with diabetes and, of those, the vast majority have developed type 2 diabetes – which is often linked to issues such as a poor diet and a lack of regular physical activity. Just as concerning – one in every four Victorians over the age of 25 is directly impacted in some way by this condition.

"With more than 305,000 Victorians living with diabetes, there is an increasing need to provide expert advice on how to live well with this condition," Mr Bennett continued. "One in three people with diabetes will develop diabetes-related eye disease, putting them at risk of losing their sight."

"Screening for diabetes complications is an essential part of managing all types of diabetes," said Mr Bennett. "As Australia's population ages, we can expect to see an increase in the number of people with conditions such as diabetic retinopathy."

According to the National Eye Health Survey<sup>1</sup>, it is estimated that one in four people<sup>2</sup> with diabetes do not have regular eye tests. Diabetic macular oedema, a frequent manifestation of diabetic retinopathy, is a common cause of vision loss from diabetes which is both preventable and, if

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<sup>1</sup> The National Eye Health Survey was released in October 2016 by Vision 2020 and the Centre for Eye Research Australia.

<sup>2</sup> According to the National Eye Health Survey, half of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants, and a quarter of non-Indigenous participants with diabetes, are not having an eye examination at the frequency recommended by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

diagnosed early, treatable. It is estimated that one in every four people with diabetes already has diabetic retinopathy in its early stages – which may have no warning signs.

“Everyone with diabetes is at risk of losing vision. Management of blood glucose levels, blood pressure and blood lipids, as well as timely treatment, can reduce the incidence of eye disease and vision loss,” added Mr Bennett. “If nothing is done to address this growing problem, it is estimated that in the next 15 years the number of people with diabetic macular oedema will almost double. Regular eye examinations are vital. With regular self-management and health professional support, people can live a long and healthy life with diabetes.”

Current data<sup>3</sup> suggest that over one million Australians will be living with blindness or vision impairment by 2020 and a significant portion of this burden will be due to the growth in diabetes and diabetic retinopathy.

*We **support, empower and campaign** for all Victorians affected by diabetes.*

**For more information:**

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**Note to editors:**

- World Diabetes Day is celebrated every year on 14 November.
- The day is a significant date in the diabetes calendar – it marks the anniversary of the birth of the man who co-discovered the medical use of insulin, Sir Frederick Banting. Banting was responsible for isolating insulin for the first time in 1922, alongside Charles Best, for which they won a Nobel Prize.
- World Diabetes Day is a leading global diabetes awareness and advocacy campaign, officially recognised by the United Nations and led by the International Diabetes Federation.
- The lighting up of the northern façade of the Royal Exhibition Building in blue will take place at 8pm on Thursday 10 November, as part of the International Diabetes Federation monument challenge.
- The 'Blue Monument Challenge' was launched in 2007 to mark the first United Nations observed World Diabetes Day. Since then, thousands of iconic sites and buildings in over 80 countries have gone blue to raise diabetes awareness on World Diabetes Day.
- Diabetes is a serious, progressive and complex condition which can result in health complications.
- Diabetic retinopathy occurs when the tiny blood vessels inside the retina at the back of the eye are damaged as a result of diabetes. This can seriously affect vision and in some cases cause blindness.
- The National Eye Health Survey, led by Vision 2020 Australia and the Centre for Eye Research Australia, is the first comprehensive national survey of the prevalence of vision loss in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This survey provides a benchmark

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<sup>3</sup> Deloitte Access Economics Pty Ltd, 'The economic impact of diabetic macular oedema in Australia', Bayer Australia Ltd, April 2015

against which to measure national progression in eye health and vision care. Almost 5,000 people participated in the survey.

- Half of Indigenous participants and a quarter of non-Indigenous participants with diabetes are not having an eye examination at the frequency recommended by the National Health and Medical Research Council.
- Almost 53 per cent of Indigenous participants and almost 78% of non-Indigenous participants with diabetes had the recommended retinal examination.
- The National Eye Health Survey was conducted in partnership with Vision 2020 Australia and was supported by funding from the Australian Government under the Chronic Disease Prevention and Service Improvement Fund.