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It's time to recognise distress caused by diabetes

A new National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) resource has recently been released titled ***Diabetes and emotional health: A handbook for health professionals supporting adults with type 1 or type 2 diabetes***. This resource has been developed by the Australian Centre for Behavioural Research in Diabetes (ACBRD), in collaboration with Diabetes Australia.

This new handbook gives health professionals the strategies and tools to better recognise emotional problems and to work with people with diabetes to reduce the significant psychological burden that can be caused by diabetes. One of the chapters in the handbook, ***Diabetes distress***, focuses on the emotional distress resulting from living with diabetes and the burden of daily self-management.

Last week, saw 1166 national celebrations across 165 countries for World Diabetes Day. The theme for World Diabetes Day was 'eyes on diabetes', highlighting one of the most common complications of diabetes. One of the key messages for 2016 emphasised the importance of screening for diabetes complications, as an essential part of managing diabetes.

Professor Jane Speight, Foundation Director of the ACBRD, says that that it is important to remember that emotional and physical health are equally important for diabetes management. She urges health professionals to consider screening for the emotional impacts of diabetes, in addition to the physical ones.

“Our previous Diabetes MILES study showed that diabetes-related emotional problems are common, and they are just as serious and deserving of attention as the physical complications of diabetes” Professor Speight said. “For example, we found 1 in 4 people with type 1 diabetes and 1 in 5 people with type 2 diabetes experience severe diabetes distress. Importantly, the main concern for people with diabetes is ‘worrying about the future and the possibility of serious complications.’”

Dr Adriana Ventura, psychologist with the ACBRD, said the ***Diabetes distress*** chapter in the handbook highlights the importance for every health consultation to include the opportunity for the person to express how they are actually feeling about life with diabetes.

“People with diabetes often want opportunities to talk about their emotional wellbeing with their health professional. Diabetes distress is a common emotional response to living with diabetes, but it can fluctuate over time and may peak during challenging periods such as soon after diagnosis or during changes in treatment regimen, so it’s important to have the conversation regularly to prevent it from becoming severe.”

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“Many health professionals feel that they do not have the appropriate training to offer support to people with diabetes who are emotionally distressed, so this handbook is an important new resource for them. It will help health professionals to feel more confident to have conversations about diabetes distress during consultations” Dr Ventura added.

Diabetes Australia CEO A/Professor Greg Johnson said the new handbook is a critical tool to promote more holistic diabetes healthcare.

“Untreated diabetes distress represents a very serious health impact for people with diabetes. We know that people with diabetes experiencing emotional problems are more likely to have worsened diabetes outcomes, higher risk of complications, lower quality of life, and higher healthcare costs.” A/Professor Johnson said.

“Identifying and addressing diabetes distress, through regular screening and monitoring, is recommended in Australian and International health professional guidelines, and could be a cost effective way to improve the health of people with diabetes. This handbook provides health professionals with the practical information and tools they need to effectively address this serious issue.”

Electronic copies of the *Diabetes and Emotional Health* handbook for health professionals are free and can be accessed here:
www.ndss.com.au/online-resources-for-health-professionals.

A free factsheet about diabetes distress for people with diabetes has also been developed and can be accessed here: www.ndss.com.au/diabetes-distress

The National Diabetes Services Scheme is an initiative of the Australian Government administered with the assistance of Diabetes Australia.

Note to editors:

- This handbook and factsheet were developed as a part of the NDSS Mental Health and Diabetes National Development Programme. They were developed in collaboration with the Australian Centre for Behavioural Research in Diabetes (ACBRD), a partnership for better health between Diabetes Victoria and Deakin University.
- The handbook has undergone evaluation, which involved interviews with health professionals (e.g. diabetes educators, GPs, nurses, dietitians, endocrinologists) and people with diabetes, who read and commented on advanced copies of the book.
- Mental healthcare for people with diabetes is recognised as a priority area in the Australian National Diabetes Strategy 2016–2020, see report here: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/nds-2016-2020>.
- Diabetes is a serious, progressive and complex condition, which can result in serious health complications.

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- **The Diabetes MILES Study** (Management and Impact for Long-term Empowerment and Success) was a national survey of the psychosocial health and well-being of 3338 Australian adults with type 1 or type 2 diabetes. The study was conducted in 2011 by the ACBRD, with funding from the NDSS. The report is available at: <https://static.diabetesaustralia.com.au/s/fileassets/diabetes-australia/4e052ae5-2d13-421e-b6f8-5e323b5c48a6.pdf>.
- For more information about Diabetes MILES, see: www.diabetesmiles.org.au. In Australia, around 1.7 million people are living with diabetes and a further 280 develop diabetes every day.

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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