



Diabetes: more than a spiralling health issue

Diabetes and its complications are leading causes of death, illness and disability in Australia. An AIHW report in 2010 forecast that type 2 diabetes would become the number one cause of disease burden (combining death and disability) in the next 5 years. The number of people diagnosed continues to grow by around 280 new cases every day. Approximately 1.7 million Australians are affected when we include all types of diabetes.

In a new Diabetes Australia report commissioned from Deloitte Access Economics, the productivity impact of this highly prevalent, chronic health condition has been quantified.

Commenting on the report on World Diabetes Day, Health Minister Hon Peter Dutton said, "Diabetes is not just a health issue and a threat to our health system and spiralling costs - it is more and more an economic and productivity issue threatening Australia's private and business sector."

"Diabetes Australia's report places the productivity impact of diabetes in Australia currently at \$5.6 billion per year." Minister Dutton said.

The total estimated cost of diabetes in Australia in 2013 was a\$14.6 billion (including direct healthcare, direct non-healthcare, and social costs)¹. However, according to Professor Greg Johnson, CEO of Diabetes Australia, the Deloitte Access Economics analysis suggests we are may be underestimating the burden of diabetes in the workplace.

"With so many Australians now diagnosed and living with diabetes, it is becoming necessary for every employer and every workplace to think about diabetes" said Prof Johnson

"The economic cost of diabetes to individuals, families, employers, businesses and governments is substantial and is greater in those with complications. These costs are due not only to the diagnosis and care of diabetes itself but also to the diagnosis and treatment of its complications – blindness and vision impairment, kidney failure

¹ C Lee et al The cost of diabetes in adults in Australia. *Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice* 99(2013) 385-390.

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and dialysis, amputations, heart attacks, strokes, and more,” said Professor Johnson.

“The social impact of diabetes is substantial, affecting the daily lives of not only those that have the condition, but also their friends and family.” In addition to the direct impact of the burden of diabetes complications such as losing partial or total sight or losing a limb due to amputation a person’s social engagement, independence and wellbeing can be affected. Complications may be severe enough to cause loss of the ability to work, which has its own consequences.

“A diagnosis of diabetes can also affect a person’s participation in the workforce. People with diabetes may reduce the number of hours they work, or exit the workforce entirely.”

Employment rates for males with diabetes are not significantly different to the employment rates for males in the general population however, females with diabetes have lower rates of employment (58.4%) compared to females in the general population (67.2%). This represents a productivity loss from reduced employment of \$1.4 billion in 2014.

“Employers need to provide workplaces where all employees (including people with diabetes) have access to healthy food options and opportunities for physical activity. In addition, people with diabetes also need to feel that they can check their blood glucose levels, inject insulin if they need this, and manage their diabetes in a safe and timely manner and without fear of stigma or judgement.” Said Prof Johnson “If this supportive work environment is not provided then the adverse impact on productivity to Australia is as high as \$3.5 billion per year

People with diabetes may die prematurely due to complications like heart attacks, strokes and kidney failure, losing remaining lifetime earnings. This adverse productivity impact is estimated at \$269m in 2014. [Deloitte ACCESS Economics 2014]

People with diabetes may sometimes require informal care from family and friends in the workplace which is not “free” in an economic sense. It is estimated that carer costs associated with diabetes in 2014 are \$150m.

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