

16 March 2013

Celebrating 60 years of reducing the impact of diabetes

The peak body for people with diabetes in Victoria, Diabetes Australia – Vic, celebrates 60 years of service to the Victorian community on Saturday 16 March.

To mark the occasion Melbourne Lord Mayor: The Honourable Robert Doyle will host a celebration at the Melbourne Town Hall, where 60 years ago in 1953 a group of citizens and medical researchers met to set up an organisation to lobby on behalf of people with diabetes. DA–Vic Chief Executive Craig Bennett said the organisation is still as important today.

Mr Bennett said at least 1.5 million Australians were thought to have diabetes including a significant number where diabetes had not been formally diagnosed.

Almost 1.1 million Australians are currently registered with the National Diabetes Services Scheme. Two hundred and eighty Australians develop diabetes every day.

“Diabetes is the fastest growing chronic disease in Australia and the prevalence of all types of diabetes – type 1, type 2 and gestational diabetes is increasing. The most recent estimate put the cost of diabetes in Australia at \$14.6 billion in 2010,” Mr Bennett said.

The 1950s saw big strides for people with diabetes following the development of synthetic insulin. The role of insulin in managing diabetes was first discovered in 1921.

“Until the role of insulin in the body was discovered and people could start leading normal lives, the prognosis for people with diabetes was poor. Prior to 1921 people who had type 1 diabetes did not live long. We still do not know the cause of type 1 diabetes, but we know it is an auto-immune disease that destroys the cells in the pancreas which produce insulin. We do not know what causes this reaction, but the diabetes community is determined to find out,” Mr Bennett said.

Mr Bennett said while a cure for type 1 diabetes remained elusive, researchers were improving insulin delivery options and making life more comfortable for people with the condition.

The main event marking the 60th anniversary will be a celebration of the anniversary of the first meeting of the Victorian Diabetic Association.

Prominent figures in the diabetes community who attended the first meeting in 1953 such as Harald Breidahl, an endocrinologist and long-time champion of diabetes research and Anna Moresby, a long-time educator, will be present. Another central figure, Neill Decker OAM, pharmacist and inventor of the Decker Injector (used for injecting insulin) will also be attending.

“In celebrating this important milestone we want to highlight the progress we have made and reflect on the reason why we were established – to improve the lives of people living with diabetes,” Mr Bennett said.

“Over the past 60 years the treatment of and research into the cause of diabetes has developed significantly. We are proud to have assisted people with all types of diabetes in Victoria over this period,” Mr Bennett said.

A new historical display showcasing photographs and medical equipment used in the treatment and management of diabetes over the years will be on show.

A visual timeline outlining some of the more significant research developments and milestones, such as the discovery of insulin in 1921 and the 2000 AusDiab study which showed that almost 25 per cent of Australians have diabetes or pre-diabetes will be on display.

Features and interviews:

Craig Bennett, DA–Vic CEO

Janet Rahman, three generations of type 1 diabetes in one family, mother and daughter
Young person with type 2 diabetes

Harald Breidahl, an endocrinologist and long-time champion of diabetes research

Neil Decker, former pharmacist and inventor of the Decker injector

Peg Kearin, person with diabetes, Diabetes Nurse Educator as well as community support group convenor

Great photo opportunity - Medical equipment for diabetes management over 60 years

Note to editor:

There are three types of diabetes: type 1, type 2 and gestational. In people with diabetes, blood glucose levels are higher than normal because the body does not produce enough insulin or cannot use insulin properly or a combination of both. Insulin is a hormone needed for glucose to enter the cells and be converted to energy.

For more information:

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