

Media information
MONDAY 15 MAY 2006

DIABETES HITS 275 AUSTRALIANS EACH DAY AS PANDEMIC SPREADS

A new national health study funded by the NH&MRC, industry and state governments released today by the International Diabetes Institute in Melbourne shows diabetes is hitting up to 275 new victims each day throughout Australia.

The findings of the Australian Diabetes, Obesity and Lifestyle Study (AusDiab) were presented today to the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Mr Tony Abbott and provide the first definitive, clear picture of the rising tide of diabetes, obesity, hypertension (increased blood pressure) and chronic kidney disease.

The statistics reveal that in Australia each year:

- Approximately 100,000 adults develop diabetes (275 people daily)
- More than 200,000 people progress from being overweight to being obese (nearly 600 people daily)
- 400,000 adults develop hypertension, and
- 270,000 adults develop chronic kidney disease.

The Australia-wide study was conducted by the International Diabetes Institute over the last 15 months and is the first to have measured how many new cases of these diseases occur in Australia annually.

The results are drawn from a follow-up investigation of more than 6,000 adults whose health was first assessed five years ago during the Institute's landmark AusDiab Study. IDI researchers established a world-first by identifying a national representative sample of Australia's adult population and carrying out individual blood tests for diabetes.

The Director of the International Diabetes Institute, Professor Paul Zimmet, said the research findings sent a "Red Alert" to ordinary Australians and to those charged with responsibility for public health.

"With 275 new cases of diabetes and 600 cases of obesity occurring each day, we now have compelling proof that Australia's diabetes epidemic is in full flight." Professor Zimmet said.

In addition to measuring the development of new cases, the follow-up study showed that during the last 5 years:

- People's waistlines increased on average by 2.1 cm and their weight by 1.4 kg
- People with prediabetes* were 15 times more likely to develop diabetes than those with normal blood sugar levels
- Obese people were 4 times more likely to develop diabetes than those with normal weight
- People with high blood pressure were 3 times more likely to develop diabetes than those who had normal blood pressure, and
- People who are physically inactive had twice the risk of developing diabetes than those who were active.

Professor Zimmet said, "There is no doubt that diabetes and its associated problems of heart disease, strokes, amputations and kidney failure will have a profound impact on Australia's future health budgets.

"What we have done is to quantify the risks. We now have hard data which give our Federal and State governments the first tangible indication of the size of the problem which will burden current and future generations. These data will be instrumental in establishing priorities and calculating future budgetary needs.

"The diabetes epidemic is being driven by lifestyle factors, particularly the dramatic increase in obesity, poor diet and physical inactivity – and is already costing taxpayers over \$3 billion annually. That figure will increase exponentially over time," he said.

The Institute's Deputy Director, Associate Professor Jonathan Shaw, said the latest research had given Australia more accurate information on diabetes and its consequences than that possessed by almost any other nation.

"It also gives every Australian a clear indication of the increased risk they face of developing diabetes and its appalling complications if they do not make lifestyle changes," he said.

The first stage of the AusDiab study - which was conducted in 1999/2000 and involved more than 11,000 people - provided a 'snapshot' of the nation's health. It showed that one million people had diabetes, another two million had prediabetes and more than 60% of adults were either overweight or obese.

The AusDiab study was made possible by a \$2.6 million grant from the National Health & Medical Research Council, with support from state governments, pharmaceutical companies and individual donors.

* Prediabetes, also known as impaired glucose tolerance (IGT) or impaired fasting glucose (IFG), occurs when the blood glucose level is higher than normal but not high enough to be classified as diabetes.

Further Information:

A full copy of the AusDiab Report can be accessed at:

<http://www.diabetes.com.au/AusDiab/AusDiabLaunch.zip>

Password: Fwq7CfT4A

Professor Paul Zimmet
International Diabetes Institute
0418 359 151
(03) 9258 5048

Felicity Moffatt
Health Communications Australia
0418 677 701
02 9818 4377

Stuart Maxwell-Wright
Consultus Australia
0419 133 446
(03) 9787 9099

Note to Editors

The AusDiab study findings will be released at a news conference in the Royce Room, the Royce Hotel, 379 St. Kilda Road, Melbourne at 10.30 am on Monday, 15 May 2006.