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World Health Day highlights the impact of Diabetes – If diabetes were a country it would be the world’s THIRD largest -

Australia recorded another grim diabetes milestone in 2015 with the number of people newly diagnosed with the condition topping 100,000 for the second year in a row, according to new figures released by Diabetes Australia.

In Tasmania we are seeing approximately 174 people per month diagnosed.

The figures were released today (April 7) as part of World Health Day, a World Health Organisation (WHO) awareness day.

This year the WHO is highlighting diabetes as the major global health challenge of the 21st century and one of the biggest threats to economies across the globe.

Diabetes Tasmania CEO Caroline Wells said that the 100,000 people diagnosed in 2015 took the total number of Australians now living with all types of diabetes to 1.2 million and that if diabetes were a country it would be the world’s 3rd largest.

“These figures are in contrast to some other chronic conditions including cardiovascular disease and some cancers where we are seeing a reduction in the burden of these as prevention, treatment and management improves,” said Ms Wells.

“On top of this these figures, Diabetes Australia estimates there around two million adult Australians with prediabetes who are the high risk population likely to develop type 2 diabetes. This equates to about 40,000 Tasmanians”

Ms Wells said strong evidence showed that a coordinated, comprehensive diabetes prevention program could help slow the diabetes epidemic.

“We have very strong evidence that intensive lifestyle behaviour changes including alterations to diet, increased physical activity and a reduction of 5-7 per cent of body weight can reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes by around 60 per cent for people at high risk,” she said.

“What Australia doesn’t have is a National Diabetes Prevention Program like the United States where they are systematically identifying high risk individuals and helping them access affordable prevention programs in the community.

“The Victorian Government has funded a diabetes prevention program since 2008 and the Queensland Government is now funding a similar program. It is now Tasmania’s turn to step up to the mark.

“Diabetes Tasmania has advocated to the State Government, both in the Joint Select Committee on Preventative Health and the recent Healthy Tasmania consultation the critical importance of funding diabetes prevention programs.

“Diabetes is the biggest challenge confronting Australia’s health system and the longer we put off coordinated, comprehensive action - the more the numbers continue to skyrocket.”

Ms Wells said it was important that the discussion covered the cost to individuals and communities as well as the financial cost.

“Although the financial costs are staggering at an estimated \$14.6 billion dollars per year, the human cost is even more devastating,” she said.

“Diabetes is the leading cause of preventable blindness in working age Australians. Thousands of Australians lose their sight every year and tragically 98 per cent of this is preventable, it is also the leading cause of lower limb amputation with around 70 Australians undergoing diabetes-related limb amputations every week.”

These are just two of the major complications that can arise from undiagnosed and poorly managed diabetes; others that are just as serious are chronic kidney disease, stroke and heart disease. Early diagnosis, optimal treatments and effective ongoing support and management reduce the risk of diabetes-related complications.

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