

Media Information

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Aussie mums help nation carry heavy burden of type 1 diabetes

Unique study uncovers impact and costs of Australia's type 1 diabetes challenge

A new report released today highlights for the first time the significant personal and financial burden carried by carers - notably Australian mums - in helping the nation support young Australians living with type 1 diabetes.

The DiabCo\$t Type 1 study found mums had taken almost a day a month off work, on average, (during the 3 months assessed by the researchers) to care for children with type 1 diabetes. On average they reported losing \$7,413 in wages over the year.

More than half reported that caring for their loved ones with type 1 diabetes was a financial strain and that major adjustments in family and personal circumstances had been made. Employment for one-in-six mums (17%) had been reduced in order to care for their child with over two thirds (70%) experiencing an accompanying reduction in income.

Led by diabetes experts at the University of Sydney, the DiabCo\$t Type 1 study is the first to investigate the significant financial burden of type 1 diabetes in Australia, while also assessing the personal and social impact on both the individual with the condition and their carer. Data for the study was gathered from 2,200 Australians with type 1 diabetes and their carers.

Currently over 120,000 Australians are living with type 1 diabetes.¹ It is one of the most serious chronic diseases of childhood² with about half of those with type 1 diabetes developing the disease before reaching 18 years of age.³

The DiabCo\$t initiative was developed through a collaboration involving the Menzies Centre for Health Policy and The Boden Institute of Obesity, Nutrition & Exercise at the University of Sydney, Diabetes Australia, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation and Eli Lilly Australia.

“Even though Australia has one of the highest rates of type 1 diabetes in children in the world – until now we’ve had no comprehensive local data detailing the burden of this disease,” states Associate Professor Ruth Colaguri, Director of the Diabetes Unit, Menzies Centre for Health Policy, University of Sydney. “This report provides important insights to guide policy and service delivery in helping to minimise the personal and societal impact of type 1 diabetes.”

Greg Johnson, Acting Chief Executive, Diabetes Australia agrees this report provides critical new information to help inform policy development and prioritise resource allocation and future strategies – notably where carers are concerned. “The impact on parents of children with type 1 diabetes, in particular, should not be underestimated and increased support is required to help manage the financial burden and to minimise the impact on workforce participation,” he comments.

Substantial personal burden for those with type 1 diabetes

The day-to-day challenge of managing blood glucose levels for those living with type 1 diabetes was also reinforced within the study. During the three month assessment, approximately one-in-five (19%) people with type 1 diabetes reported experiencing, on average, almost three severe hypoglycaemic episodes (a significant drop in blood sugar levels) requiring assistance.

While the average age of respondents was just 32 years, more than one-in-10 (12.3%) reported microvascular health complications (nerve damage, kidney disease and vision disorders) - most commonly eye problems.

Costs increase with complications

The DiabCo\$t study found annual costs for each individual with type 1 diabetes were \$4,669, on average, (consisting of \$3,862 for diabetes care and treatment and \$807 in indirect costs associated with lost work time). Hospitalisation accounted for nearly half of the direct health care costs.

Presence of complications significantly increased the use of healthcare resources and costs. Those with health complications had approximately twice the number of GP visits and twice the number of emergency admissions to casualty per year. The average total cost for those with microvascular and also macrovascular complications (including heart disease and stroke) was five times that of those with none (\$16,698 versus \$3,468).

“Additional costs are incurred and quality of life is significantly influenced by diabetes-related complications,” says Professor Stephen Colaguri, The Boden Institute of Obesity, Nutrition and Exercise (BIONE), The University of Sydney. “This study emphasises that strategies to improve the quality of diabetes care to prevent or delay the development of diabetes-related complications would have substantial economic and personal benefit,” he added.

The total yearly cost to the nation for type 1 diabetes was calculated at \$570 million.

“This report highlights the significant personal and economic costs faced by individuals and families living with the burden of type 1 diabetes in Australia,” adds Mike Wilson, Chief Executive Officer, The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. “As research breakthroughs provide us with new and better diabetes management options, it is crucial that Australians living with type 1 diabetes have access to these options without suffering undue financial hardship.”

Issued on behalf of the DiabCo\$t collaboration by Cube. For further information please contact Anne-Marie Sparrow on 0417 421 560 or Kylie Whetton on 0413 061 122.

About The Study:

The DiabCo\$t Type 1 study was supported with a Strategic Development Grant from the National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) and an unconditional, educational grant from Eli Lilly Australia. (The NDSS is an Australian Government program administered by Diabetes Australia).

The Study involved a retrospective, cross-sectional, self-reported survey of 2,200 Australians with type 1 diabetes. People were randomly selected from the NDSS register. Two questionnaires were involved one for individuals with type 1 diabetes and one for their carers. Parents/guardians/carers were asked to assist with completing the survey when it was sent to children. The survey requested information from the previous 3 months. Data was collected in 2006.

Additional Findings:

CARERS:

- Approximately one third of those with type 1 diabetes reported having a carer - 90% were female. The mean age of carer was 42.9 years.
- The majority of carers (74.8%) were parents of the person with type 1 diabetes and 16.9% were spouses/partners.
- Nearly one-in-five (19%) of carers reported being retired or currently not working in order to care for the person with diabetes.

INDIVIDUALS WITH TYPE 1 DIABETES:

- Almost nine-in-ten (88.7%) respondents, with type 1 diabetes, reported having mild hypoglycaemic episodes (lower than normal blood sugar levels) during the three months assessed by the researcher. On average they experienced just under 16 episodes per person.
- When compared by age group, people with type 1 diabetes reported a lower overall quality of life compared with people with type 2 diabetes and compared with the general Australian population.

References:

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Diabetes Australian Facts 2008, Diabetes Series 8
2. The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) Fact Sheet – What is Type 1 Diabetes?
http://www.jdrf.org.au/s/media/documents/factsheets/what_is_type_1_diabetes_2009.pdf (Accessed 16 November 2009)
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Incidence of Type 1 diabetes in Australia 2000-2006, First Results, Diabetes Series 9