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Media Statement

RESEARCH GROUP PLACES SPOTLIGHT ON DIABETES STIGMA

A leading WA diabetes research group is warning people with diabetes can be at increased risk of psychological distress because of a culture of blame linked to the condition.

Ahead of Mental Health Week (October 4-10), Diabetes Research WA is urging people to re-think their attitudes towards all forms of diabetes.

“We hear all the time from people with diabetes – both those with type 1 and type 2 diabetes – who say they are discriminated against and made to feel they’re to blame for their condition and there is Australian research to back up these experiences,” said Diabetes Research WA executive director Sherl Westlund.

“It’s a complicated issue because we know – and need the community to know that – by adopting a healthy eating plan, maintaining a healthy weight and staying physically active nearly six out of 10 cases of type 2 diabetes could be prevented. This is particularly powerful when you have a family history of type 2 diabetes, increasing your risk.

“But that means four out of every 10 people with type 2 diabetes may not have been able to do anything to stop themselves developing it and there’s also no known way to prevent type 1 diabetes so when someone makes a person feel they are to blame for their condition, they are making a huge assumption.”

Ms Westlund said more and more research was pointing to the complexity of type 2 diabetes and illustrating why it was critical to put the spotlight on the stigma associated with the condition.

“A recently-released study out of the US has shown that babies exposed in early gestation to the man-made Ukrainian Famine of 1932-33 in regions with extreme food shortages were 1.5 times more likely to be diagnosed with type 2 diabetes in adulthood,” she said.

“This is just one example of how many factors are involved in this condition and helps underscore why playing the diabetes blame game must stop.”

Ms Westlund said this type of discovery also demonstrated why it was critical the community got behind diabetes research.

“Research such as this highlights that anyone can be at risk of developing diabetes and its why we are so committed to funding world-leading West Australian research into the condition,” she said.

“Our new Be Extraordinary. Give Regularly initiative is all about making sure people know they can be part of the solution for themselves and future generations – giving regularly to research – even if it’s just \$20 a month can make an extraordinary difference.

“And there’s a huge upside to this type of support in that there is no middleman and no need for organisations to spend money on campaigns to raise money, meaning 100% of the contribution goes to the charity.

Visit www.diabetesresearchwa.com.au for further details.

-BACKGROUND FOLLOWS-

BACKGROUND

- 280 Australians develop diabetes every day. That's one person every 5 minutes.
- Around 1.7 million Australians have diabetes. This includes all types of diagnosed diabetes (1.2 million known and registered) as well as silent, undiagnosed type 2 diabetes (up to 500,000 estimated).
- Total annual cost impact of diabetes in Australia estimated at \$14.6 billion.
- Diabetes is the fastest growing chronic condition in Australia; increasing at a faster rate than other chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer.
- Type 1 diabetes accounts for 10% of all diabetes and is increasing.
- Type 2 diabetes accounts for 85% of all diabetes and is increasing.
- Being overweight or obese is one risk factor for type 2 diabetes; it is not a direct cause. Some people who are overweight may not develop type 2 diabetes while some people who are of a healthy weight will develop type 2 diabetes.
- Many Australians, particularly those over 40, are at risk of developing type 2 diabetes through lifestyle factors such as nutrition and physical activity. Family history and genetics also play a role in type 2 diabetes.
- Gestational diabetes in pregnancy is increasing.

LINKS

Australian stigma research <http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/3/11/e003384.full.pdf+html>

Ukraine famine research http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2015-09/cums-iof090315.php

Type 2 diabetes & epigenetics http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2014-03/lu-ecc030714.php

<https://www.perkins.org.au/news/diabetes-study-finds-hidden-obesity-genes>

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