

10 percent of diabetes cases among adults aged 50+ are undiagnosed

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Credit: Darren Lewis/public domain

New research shows that 10% of adults aged 50 and over in Ireland, the equivalent to 120,000 older adults, have type 2 diabetes, rising to 16% in those aged 80 and over. The study from the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), led by Trinity College Dublin further reveals that one in ten cases of the disease are undiagnosed in this population. A further 5.5% of the older population have pre-diabetes, placing them at increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes in the future.

The new research has just been published in the prestigious *Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice* and was discussed last week at a Tilda Conference for better policies for ageing in Ireland.

Key Findings:

- 1 in 10 of the population aged over 50 in Ireland had diabetes, the equivalent to 120,000 people aged over 50 in Ireland. The majority had their diabetes diagnosed but a substantial proportion of those with diabetes were undiagnosed (1 in 10).
- The prevalence of pre-diabetes was 5.5%. These people are at increased risk of developing diabetes.
- Type 2 diabetes was more common in men (12%) than women (7%) and increased with age from 5% in 50-59 year olds to 16% in those aged 80+.
- There is a strong relationship between being male and both diabetes and pre-diabetes. A self-reported history of hypertension and being centrally obese also had strong relationships with both diabetes and pre-diabetes.
- There was a strong relationship with increasing age, a self-reported history of high cholesterol, having poor or fair self-rated health and reporting low levels of physical activity with having diabetes.
- Undiagnosed type 2 diabetes was more common outside of Dublin; compared to those living in Dublin city or county, persons living in other urban or rural areas were more likely to have undiagnosed diabetes,
- Private health insurance holders were less likely to have undiagnosed diabetes compared to those with neither public nor private medical costs cover.

This research is unique because it provides the first national prevalence of diagnosed, undiagnosed and pre-diabetes in older Irish adults and

shows that our rates of diabetes are similar to those of other European countries.

Type 2 diabetes is a leading cause of death and disability in Ireland and internationally. Diabetes is associated with an increased risk of heart attacks, heart failure, kidney disease and falls, resulting in disability, loss of independence and early mortality. Consequently, diabetes accounts for approximately 10% of Irish healthcare expenditure.

The study also shows that diabetes is more common in men than women. People with diabetes, compared to those without the condition, are more likely to be obese, have low levels of physical activity and suffer from other health conditions such as high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

Speaking about the findings, lead author, Dr. Siobhan Leahy said "These findings confirm for the first time the total burden of type 2 diabetes in [older adults](#) in Ireland. While efforts are underway to improve care and access to services for those with diabetes a significant number of older adults with diabetes remain undiagnosed and therefore untreated. Lifestyle factors are clearly associated with diabetes and pre-diabetes and public health campaigns promoting the benefits of a healthy lifestyle may help reduce the future incidence of diabetes in Ireland and lessen complications in those with diagnosed diabetes"

Principal Investigator of the TILDA Study and senior author of the study, Professor Rose Anne Kenny added: "Diabetes and its related complications account for up to 10% of healthcare expenditure annually. Timely diagnosis and treatment of the disease are key to reducing this healthcare burden. However our findings emphasise that there is still a significant proportion of Irish adults with [diabetes](#) who remain undiagnosed, and targeted screening may help to reduce this."

More information: S. Leahy et al. Prevalence and correlates of

diagnosed and undiagnosed type 2 diabetes mellitus and pre-diabetes in older adults: Findings from the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), *Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice* (2015). DOI: [10.1016/j.diabres.2015.10.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.diabres.2015.10.015)

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