

New study finds increasing health burden of type 2 diabetes in Australia

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The prevalence of type 2 diabetes has tripled over the past 30 years in Australia, with increasing rates of disease complications placing a growing health burden on the population.

Research from Deakin University's Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition (IPAN) found that in Australia between 1990 and 2019, the total number of people with type 2 [diabetes](#) tripled—from 379,532 to 1,307,261—and while people were less likely to die from the illness than they were 30 years ago, the rate of medical complications increased, particularly among men. The paper is published in the journal *Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice*.

Lead researcher, Associate Professor Shariful Islam, said this was the first study to benchmark the burden of type 2 diabetes in Australia against 14 similar socioeconomic countries and the findings were of huge concern.

"Australia ranked 4th in terms of disease burden in 2019 but 11th (fifth worst) for deaths due to type 2 diabetes," Associate Professor Islam said.

"This tells us there is an urgent need to improve the prevention and management of type 2 diabetes in Australia. Overall, men had higher incidence of type 2 diabetes, most notably since 2010 when the prevalence among men tripled compared to women.

"A possible explanation for the increasing rate among men is the strong link between type 2 diabetes and obesity, particularly abdominal obesity which is more likely to occur in men than women, especially pre-menopausal women.

"Risk factors such as [alcohol consumption](#), smoking, unhealthy eating habits and [sedentary lifestyles](#) may also influence the higher rates of type 2 diabetes in men."

The study also found that the prevalence of type 2 diabetes:

- increased in people aged between 25 and 29 years,

- increased sharply among people aged 40 years and over, and
- was highest among people aged 80 years and above.

Deaths from type 2 diabetes also increased among those aged 70 years and above.

For the study, Associate Professor Islam used a specialized computer program developed by the Global Burden of Disease to analyze data on the total number of people with type 2 diabetes between 1990 and 2019 both in Australia and across 14 similar socioeconomic countries, including the United Kingdom, United States, New Zealand and Singapore.

"We wanted to see how type 2 diabetes affects people of different ages and genders; the impact on their quality of life, how many years of life they lost because of it, and how many people died from it both in Australia and across other similar countries," Associate Professor Islam said.

"Understanding the trends and changes in the burden of type 2 diabetes over time can identify where efforts to prevent and manage diabetes are working and where improvements are needed.

"This information will help policymakers, [health care professionals](#) and the community more broadly reassess the strategies and resources currently in use, particularly for men and [older adults](#) where improving accessibility of education and screening programs is clearly an issue," Associate Professor Islam said.

More information: Sheikh Mohammed Shariful Islam et al, The burden of type 2 diabetes in Australia during the period 1990–2019: Findings from the global burden of disease study, *Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.diabres.2023.110631](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.diabres.2023.110631)

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