

Doctors and public health researchers say shocking diabetes rates can be reduced

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(Medical Xpress) -- Leading medical specialists, public health researchers and nutritionists warn that not enough is being done to prevent the rapidly increasing diabetes rates, largely caused by significant increases in obesity in adults and children in recent years.

Between 1989 and 1997 the average [weight gain](#) in adults was 3.2 kg, and the results of the latest Adult Nutrition Survey to be released in September are likely to show that trend is continuing.

The warning comes in an open letter to the *New Zealand Medical Journal*, which criticises the cutting of [healthy eating](#) and [obesity prevention](#) programmes by the Government.

It points to the axing of the National Healthy Eating Health Action Strategy, Mission On, and the requirement for schools to provide healthy food amongst others.

The 12 signatories say diabetes is now a huge health equity issue as it impacts disproportionately on Māori and Pacific and low-income New Zealanders. It is also a major factor in the multi-million dollar cost of kidney dialysis, with 40-48% of those on dialysis because of diabetes-related kidney failure.

"Obesity accounts for more than 80% of preventable diabetes in New Zealand and is not being vigorously addressed, in fact many preventive programmes have been cut," says [public health](#) researcher Associate Professor Louise Signal from the University of Otago, Wellington.

"We have alarmingly high rates of diabetes, they're getting worse, and we compare very poorly with other OECD countries according to the June edition of the British journal the Lancet. Health professionals have been warning about this incipient health crisis for years."

They say that 63% of adults are now either overweight or obese with this trend continuing. "The worrying thing is that even now 2%-7% of the health budget (\$12.6 billion) is linked to people being overweight or obese. Obesity-related [diabetes](#) is costing us hundreds of millions a year and rising," says Signal.

The letter identifies nine urgent preventive actions that should be taken:

- Implement a national nutrition and physical activity strategy as recommended by the World Health Organization.
- Reinstate the requirement for schools to sell only [healthy food](#).
- Introduce a simple front-of-pack 'traffic light' nutritional labelling programme which shows how healthy the product is as recommended in the Review of Food Labelling Law and Policy report (2011).
- Make sure people on low incomes have enough money for a healthy diet.
- Continue to promote physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviour; e.g. reinstate the recently cut Push Play programme.
- Extend the healthy nutrition marketing programmes from the Health Sponsorship Council to include physical activity.
- Ban the marketing of junk food to children, including the self-regulatory and ineffective system governing junk food advertising.
- Increase regulation of the food and beverage industry to encourage healthy eating.
- Reduce health inequities, particularly in relation to child health.

Provided by University of Otago

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