

Targeting Pacific Islander women for type 2 diabetes management study

30 June 2015, by Sandra Hutchinson

Pacific Islanders in Australia are paying a heavy price for swapping their traditional diet for highly processed foods, with increasing obesity levels leading to skyrocketing rates of Type 2 diabetes among the local population.

Heena Akbar, from QUT's Faculty of Health, said Pacific Islanders in Queensland were up to four times more likely to be hospitalised or die from a preventable chronic disease and Type 2 diabetes was fast becoming one of biggest risk factors.

"Type 2 diabetes is a major public health concern for Pacific Islander communities residing in Queensland," she said.

"What we are finding is the diets of Pacific Islanders have changed significantly. Instead of traditional foods consisting of fresh fish, fruits and vegetables, they are now consuming highly processed foods and this is contributing to an increased prevalence of obesity and health-related problems like Type 2 diabetes.

"Despite evidence of a higher burden of sickness and death for Pacific Islander people, research shows Pacific Islanders are not utilising the support programs and education and [health care resources](#) which are critical in the self-management of diabetes."

Fijian-born Ms Akbar, whose family has been exposed to the effects of diabetes, hopes her study will not only improve the health of Pacific Islanders but also for her own extended family.

"When it comes to Type 2 diabetes, I want to do better for my children, and we need to do better for our communities," she said.

"For Pacific Islanders food and community is an important part of our collective culture in everything we do and the [women](#) in our communities play the central role around food, culture and family," Ms

Akbar said.

To improve the health of Pacific Islanders in Australia and overseas and prevent and learn about how to better manage future generations experiencing diabetes, Ms Akbar has launched an online survey for women with Type 2 diabetes identifying as Pacific Islanders.

"I have chosen to target women because in our culture the women are integral when it comes to food, culture and family," she said.

"We want to find out the individual attitudes of the Pacific Islander women and look for ways to increase community awareness of both prevention and management of diabetes.

"If we can tap into the women, the mothers and wives, we can help them help their communities.

"Pacific Islander women tend to put family first, not their health. They don't like to say they are sick or ill, and this is one of the big challenges in getting them to talk about their health. There is a stigma associated with saying 'we have diabetes because we feel we are being judged'.

"What our research has already shown is that we need to be changing community attitudes and a great place to start is in the home and with the women."

To take part in the study, visit survey.qut.edu.au/f/182903/d7b5/. The study is open to all women of any ethnic origin aged 18 years and over who are from the Pacific Islands or who identify as Pacific Islanders.

"In the long run this research will lead to better information and education practices for Pacific Islanders and help encourage women to manage their diabetes within the confines of community and cultural expectations," she said.

Diabetes Queensland CEO Michelle Trute said the organisation was pleased to be able to support Ms Akbar's research.

"Type 2 diabetes is the single biggest challenge confronting Queensland and people from the Pacific Islands are certainly in the firing line," Ms Trute said.

"There are almost 4000 Queenslanders of Pacific Island background who are living with Type 2 diabetes so we were pleased to be able to provide \$30,000 to support this project.

"Researchers like Ms Akbar are critical to build the evidence base we need to turn [diabetes](#) around."

More information: The survey is online:
survey.qut.edu.au/f/182903/d7b5/

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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