



# Talking Points:

## Keeping People with Diabetes Healthy



### Why State Legislators Should be Concerned about Diabetes

- The average annual cost of diabetes reached \$174 billion in 2007.
- The average annual health care costs for a person with diabetes are more than five times higher than for those without the disease (\$13,000 vs. \$2,500).
- Diabetes is one of the leading causes of death and disability for Americans.
- Recent studies have found that lifestyle changes such as moderate weight loss and exercise can prevent the onset of diabetes among adults at high risk.
- For people already living with diabetes, many complications of the disease can be prevented with early detection, improved delivery of care and better education about diabetes self-management.



### Diabetes Is Reaching Epidemic Proportions

- In the past 15 years, the number of people with diabetes has doubled, reaching nearly 21 million in 2005. About a third of those people have the disease but don't know it.
- An estimated 54 million American adults over age 20 have prediabetes, which means they are much more likely to develop diabetes.



### What Is Diabetes?

- Diabetes is when the body either doesn't produce (type 1) or can't properly use (type 2) insulin, which allows the body to convert the sugar from food into energy for the body's cells.
- Uncontrolled diabetes can lead to severe health complications.
  - Heart disease death rates and the risk for stroke are two to four times higher among people with diabetes.
  - Diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness among adults ages 20 to 74.
  - Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure.
  - More than 60 percent of nontraumatic lower-limb amputations occur in people who have diabetes.



### Who Is Affected?

- The overall lifetime risk of developing diabetes for children born in 2000 is:
  - About 3 in 10 for all Americans;
  - 4 in 10 for African-Americans and Hispanics; and
  - 5 in 10 for Hispanic females.
- Although it used to be considered a disease of old age, more young people are being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. The growing rates of obesity and low levels of physical activity, as well as exposure to maternal diabetes before birth, may be major contributors to the increase in type 2 diabetes during childhood and adolescence.



## Good Diabetes Management Can Reduce Costs and Disabilities, and Save Lives

- Good nutrition, maintaining an appropriate weight and regular exercise—which can also help prevent diabetes—are crucial to managing the disease.
- Education on diabetes self-management prevents hospitalizations. Every \$1 invested in education can cut health care costs by nearly \$9.
- Control of blood sugar levels reduces the risk for eye, kidney and nerve disease by 40 percent.
- Early detection of eye disease—and treatment with laser therapy—can cut the risk of blindness in half.
- Comprehensive yearly foot exams can reduce amputation rates by about half.
- Better blood pressure control can reduce health care costs by \$900 (in 2000 U.S. dollars) over the lifetime of a person with type 2 diabetes and can extend life by six months.



## What Can State Legislators Do?

- **Get educated.** Talk to your state's Diabetes Prevention and Control Program to see which communities in your state are affected by diabetes.
- **Promote active living.** People with prediabetes may be able to prevent diabetes by losing weight and becoming more active. Exercise can help those who already have diabetes control their blood sugar and reduce the need for medications. Implement policies and incentives to make it easier and more accessible for people to become physically active.
- **Make routine medical care a priority.** Since the state government is often one of the biggest employers in any state, consider what kind of support state employees with diabetes have and what should be covered. In addition to a primary medical home, successful strategies may include individual counseling and education, group education and support classes, as well as insurance coverage of testing supplies, devices and routine screenings.
- **Become a champion.** Consider spreading the word about diabetes, its complications and its costs through speeches, your Web site or public meetings. Helping people make lifestyle changes and implementing environmental changes that make healthy choices easier is a long process and takes a dedicated champion to keep the issue on the front burner.

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For more information about diabetes management, read the Keeping People With Diabetes Healthy Legislator Policy Brief at <http://www.healthystates.csg.org/>.

To find state-by-state statistics on diabetes, go to:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
<http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/statistics/index.htm#prevalence>

If you would like more information or references:

- Send your inquiry to [healthpolicy@csg.org](mailto:healthpolicy@csg.org) or
- Call the CSG Health Policy Group at (859) 244-8000