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Diabetes tech can be a lifesaver – but not everyone can afford it!

National Diabetes Week – 14 to 21 July 2024



The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has backed calls for diabetes technology like insulin pumps, continuous glucose monitors (CGMs) and flash glucose monitors (FGMs) to be subsidised for more diabetic patients – including those in rural and remote Australia – saying it would help save lives, improve health outcomes, and deliver big savings to the health system.



“These new technologies have been game changers in recent years, helping those with diabetes to manage what is a complicated and relentless disease, and to avoid the many complications that can arise from it” **RDAA President, Dr RT Lewandowski, said during National Diabetes Week 2024.**

“At the moment, though, the technology is costly and it is not being subsidised for all those who cannot afford it, meaning there is a huge gap in health equity and health outcomes.

“Widening the reach of the subsidies for these technologies would enable more diabetic patients to better manage their condition, and reduce the need for additional health services like ambulance callouts and in-hospital care – delivering an overall saving to the health system as well as benefits to patients.”

The impact of diabetes is higher in First Nations communities, as well as remote and very remote areas. In its report, *Diabetes – Australian facts*, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) found:

- People living in areas classified as *Remote* and *very remote* are 2.5 times as likely to be hospitalised for diabetes as people living in *Major cities* (after adjusting for age).
- The burden of disease from Type 2 diabetes is 4.1 times as high among First Nations people as non-Indigenous people.
- The diabetes death rate among people living in the lowest socio-economic areas is 2.3 times as high as for people living in the highest socio-economic areas (after adjusting for age).

“We welcome Federal Government initiatives to provide insulin pumps for free to Type 1 diabetes patients under 21 years of age who meet the financial and clinical eligibility requirements, but Type 1 diabetes does not magically disappear on your 21st birthday” **Dr Lewandowski said.**

“Until a cure is found, Type 1 diabetes will be something the patient has to manage for life – and currently if you can’t afford private health insurance that will cover the cost of an insulin pump, you have to fork out thousands of dollars to buy a pump when you reach the age of 21.

“If you can’t afford either health insurance or a pump, your only other choice is giving yourself multiple daily injections – a regime that can be very restrictive, and can make long-term management of Type 1 diabetes much more difficult. That’s not a great 21st birthday present in our view!

“Subsidised access to insulin pumps should be available to all those with diabetes who need one and can’t afford one, not just those under the age of 21. Likewise, continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) and flash glucose monitoring (FGM) technology is a very effective way for those with all types of diabetes to keep on top of their blood sugar levels...but again, it is not available to all.

“While it has changed the lives of thousands of Australians living with Type 1 diabetes (and its cost is covered for them under a subsidy program), thousands of other diabetic patients cannot afford it...and it is not subsidised for them.

“This includes people living with Type 2 diabetes using multiple daily insulin injections, children and young adults (aged under 30 years) living with Type 2 diabetes, and people living with a range of other types of diabetes and conditions.

“CGM and FGM technology is a gold standard of care in assisting those with diabetes to keep their blood sugar levels in an ideal target range and ensuring better long-term health outcomes.

“For those who rely on insulin therapy to stay alive – including Type 1 diabetics and some Type 2 diabetics – CGM can also literally mean the difference between life and death, as it can be used to warn the patient if their blood sugar level is dropping to a dangerously low level that can be life-threatening.

“We are at a major turning point in our journey of managing diabetes, where technology is providing enormous benefit to those living with this complicated disease – but the technology must be affordable to all.

“We urge the Federal Government to expand its subsidy programs for insulin pumps, CGM and FGM technology to ensure it is available to all those with diabetes who cannot afford it otherwise.”

There are three main types of diabetes:

- **Type 1 (or Juvenile) Diabetes** – an incurable autoimmune disease that is not preventable through diet or other lifestyle factors, with patients requiring multiple insulin injections each day, or the use of an insulin pump to provide them with insulin, to keep their blood sugar levels within range and to stay alive.
- **Type 2 Diabetes** – a condition with strong genetic and family-related (non-modifiable) risk factors, and also modifiable lifestyle risk factors (like keeping a healthy diet and increasing physical activity).
- **Gestational Diabetes** – a type of diabetes that can occur for pregnant women during pregnancy, and usually resolves following the birth of their baby.

A high resolution photo of Dr RT Lewandowski is [available here](#).

Available for interview: RDAA President, Dr RT Lewandowski
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State specific contacts also available

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