



australian diagnostic imaging association

PRESS RELEASE
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Diabetes - invest to save lives and money

On World Diabetes Day, the Federal Government is being urged to invest more heavily in the prevention and early treatment of diabetes.

“Our new Federal Government has clearly set a cost-saving agenda, and the management of diabetes is a text book case of where spending money will save money - not to mention saving lives and untold distress,” said Dr Chris Wriedt, the newly-appointed President of the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA).

Diabetes was recognised as one of Australia’s National Health Priority Areas in 1997. Around one million Australians (4%) have diabetes, a significant increase from 1.5% in 1989. The number is expected to grow to 3.5 million by 2033.

“It’s estimated Type 2 diabetes is costing Australia more than \$10 billion a year and heading upwards fast,” Dr Wriedt said.

Further investment in public prevention campaigns could significantly slow that rise.

“But crucially, the complications - which are largely avoidable - can increase the costs of managing the disease by as much as 12 times and represent about one-in-three of our avoidable hospital admissions, so better detection and treatment must also be a spending priority,” he said.

Medical imaging - such as Computed Tomography (CT), Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), and advanced angiographic techniques - can play a vital role in the management of severe diabetes complications through imaging of patients who are deemed to be clinically at risk of disease complications.

Stumbling Block

“But there’s a major stumbling block,” Dr Wriedt said.

“Diabetes has been called a disease of the poor, because rates are significantly higher among people from Indigenous and lower socio-economic backgrounds - and it’s precisely these people who can’t afford the ever-rising cost of medical imaging.”

The central problem is that Medicare rebates for medical imaging have not been indexed since 1998. Therefore, the gap patients have to pay has been steadily growing over the past 15 years and is now increasing at approximately 10% per annum.

“Acupuncture is indexed, IVF is indexed, podiatry is indexed but diagnostic imaging - which is absolutely central to managing diseases like diabetes - is not,” Dr Wriedt said.

“If the government invests to make medical imaging more affordable for diabetes sufferers, we’ll keep more people out of hospital, living happy and productive lives.

“Invest a little, to save a lot.”

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Diabetes

Australians with diabetes report a lower quality of life than non-sufferers across all eight dimensions, but particularly in relation to general health perception, physical functioning and role limitations due to physical problems.

Diabetes can result in a range of short and long term complications which are the major causes of associated morbidity and mortality. Improving the management and care of diabetes, particularly the early identification and reduction of risk factors, can delay the onset or slow the progression of complications. The complications - which are largely avoidable - can increase the costs of managing the disease by as much as 12 times. They are also the leading cause of avoidable hospitalisations, representing about one in three avoidable hospital admissions.

Complications include cardiovascular disease, lower limb amputation, end-stage kidney disease and vision loss.

The management of the multi-system / multi-organ complications of diabetes relies heavily on Medical Imaging, to determine the extent of disease or monitor the response to therapy / intervention.

Severe complications such as neuropathy require diagnostic assessment with Computed Tomography (CT), Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) or Ultrasound, whereas other complex complications such as claudication will require advanced angiographic techniques including CT angiography (+/- intervention) to be applied. These techniques evaluate the integrity of the peripheral blood supply to assess tissue viability, and may well be used in conjunction with other modalities such as Nuclear Medicine to assess the degree of bony involvement.

As well as assisting in the acute management phase of diabetes-related disease, Medical Imaging can also play a role in the prevention of severe diabetes complications through regular imaging of patients who are deemed to be clinically at risk of disease progression.

MEDIA

Jonathan Revitt, Michels Warren on 0412 639 179
or jrevitt@micwar.com.au

To speak to Dr Chris Wriedt, President of ADIA,
call (03) 8587 5187 or 0419 176 196