

The National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) is an initiative of the Australian Government administered by Diabetes Australia.

Monitoring the well-being of people with diabetes: how to translate guidelines into routine care?

The NDSS National Development Program for Mental Health and Diabetes

Halliday J^{1,2}, Hendrieckx C^{1,2}, Beeney L^{1,3}, Morrish L^{1,2}, Baxandall S¹, Speight J^{1,2,4} 1. The Australian Centre for Behavioural Research in Diabetes, Diabetes Australia – Vic, Melbourne, Victoria 2. School of Psychology, Deakin University, Burwood, Victoria 3. Diabetes Psychology Services, Sydney, NSW 4. AHP Research, Hornchurch, UK

What is the evidence?

People with diabetes (PWD) are at high risk of impaired emotional well-being, including diabetes-related distress, depression and anxiety (Figure 1).

This is an important health concern in its own right but also associated with sub-optimal self-care, including:

- ↓ medication-taking, healthy eating and physical activity
- ↓ self-monitoring of blood glucose
- ↓ attendance rates at healthcare appointments

Sub-optimal self-care is associated with higher rates of diabetes-related complications.

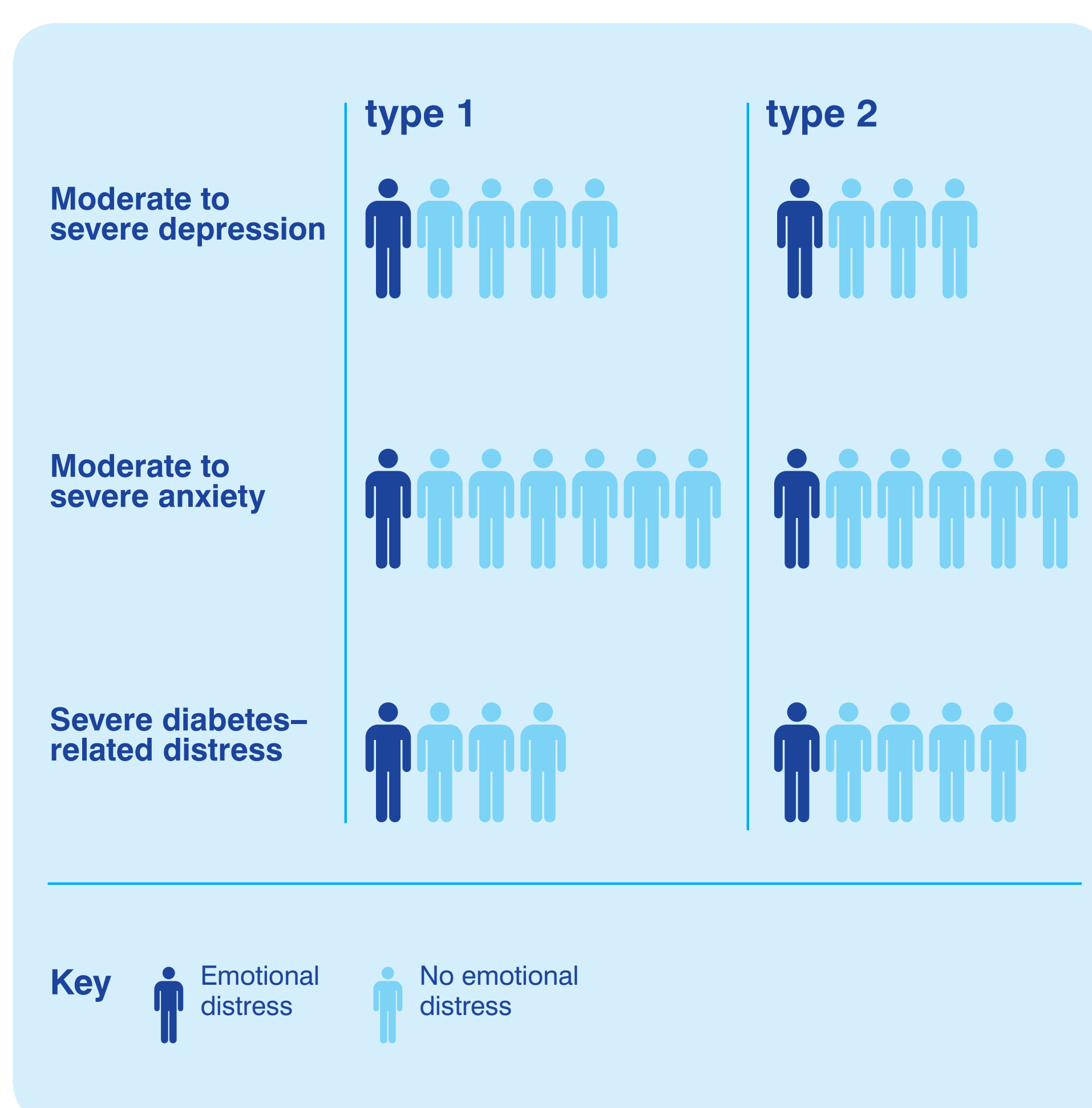


Figure 1: approximate prevalence of emotional distress in adults with diabetes¹

Why is emotional well-being not monitored routinely?

Despite existing evidence and guidelines, routine monitoring of emotional well-being in diabetes is not common practice. Indeed, evidence-based health guidelines are rarely implemented effectively⁵. A number of barriers contribute to this problem (Figure 2).

Individual, behavioural, socio-cultural, political, financial and environmental factors impact upon the implementation of routine monitoring of emotional well-being in diabetes care^{6,7}:

- Guidelines are not always clear, specific or based on good quality research
- Many HPs do not have the knowledge, skills or confidence for assessing and communicating about emotional well-being, e.g. tools to use, raising the topic
- Limited training opportunities and practical information exist for HPs about assessing emotional well-being in PWD
- Attitudes and beliefs of HPs and PWD, e.g. mental health stigma, prioritisation of medical approach over holistic approach to health
- Logistical barriers, e.g. consultation time, financial restraints, workplace policy and support
- Limited access to appropriate and diabetes-specific mental health services for referrals

Figure 2: barriers to implementation of guidelines for routine assessment of emotional well-being in diabetes care

Is it possible to monitor emotional well-being in diabetes?

Initiatives for assessing emotional well-being in diabetes have been undertaken successfully by individual clinicians. Training enables HPs to undertake emotional well-being assessment in routine diabetes care⁸ (Figure 3).

Research findings suggest that routine monitoring of emotional well-being in diabetes is possible^{7,8,9}:

- Most HPs recognise the importance of emotional well-being for diabetes care
- HPs and PWD both recognise assessment of emotional well-being to be within the role of HPs as a part of diabetes care
- Many PWD want to talk to their HP about how their diabetes affects their emotional well-being
- Validated tools for assessing emotional well-being in diabetes (e.g. PAID) are widely and freely available
- Training has been shown to increase HPs' confidence in assessing and discussing emotional well-being
- Discussing emotional well-being during consultations can improve HP-PWD relationships and satisfaction with care provided / received

Figure 3: enablers for routine assessment of emotional well-being in diabetes care

What do guidelines recommend?

Global, international and national guidelines, including those from the International Diabetes Federation (2005, 2012)², American Diabetes Association (2008, 2013)³, and Australian Diabetes Society and Australasian Paediatric Endocrine Group (2011)⁴ recommend:

- health professionals (HPs) be aware of the link between emotional well-being and diabetes
- HPs undertake routine screening of emotional well-being in PWD
- HPs need appropriate access to mental health specialists for support in assessing emotional well-being, and referrals for suspected mental health problems.

Enquiries

Program Leader: jspeight@diabetesvic.org.au
Program Co-ordinator: jhalliday@diabetesvic.org.au

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Translating research into practice: The NDSS Mental Health and Diabetes Program

The NDSS National Development Program (2012-2016) for Mental Health and Diabetes addresses the need to develop resources focused on improving the emotional well-being of PWD. A multidisciplinary Expert Reference Group has been formed to oversee the program.

One of the program aims is to develop resources for HPs to improve understanding and capacity for identifying and managing emotional well-being problems in PWD.

Program activities

1. targeted literature reviews: to inform the development of resources for HPs:
 - needs of PWD and HPs with regards to emotional well-being
 - emotional well-being problems common to people with diabetes (types, prevalence, assessment and management/treatment)
 - guidelines for routine assessment of emotional well-being in diabetes
 - barriers and enablers to implementation of guidelines
2. consultations with HPs and PWD: to inform the development of resources for HPs
3. evaluation of existing NDSS resources e.g. 'Introduction to Diabetes for Mental Health Workers', an online diabetes training program for mental health specialists

Expected outcomes

1. development of a practical handbook for HPs, describing psychosocial problems associated with diabetes:
 - what is the problem?
 - how can it be assessed?
 - how can it be addressed during consultations?
 - when and how to refer to mental health specialists
 - communicating about emotional well-being
2. establishment of a National Diabetes and Mental Health Professional Network: to support interdisciplinary collaborative practice across Australia's primary mental health care and diabetes care sectors

Results and conclusions

A targeted literature review has identified key barriers and enablers to routine assessment of emotional well-being. The results are summarised in Figures 2 and 3. The evidence shows that HPs have a distinct need for practical, diabetes-specific emotional well-being resources and training for diabetes to:

1. address skills and knowledge gaps
2. change attitudes and beliefs
3. place routine assessment of emotional well-being higher on their agenda

Investigating the needs of HPs has been a necessary and valuable step for developing and refining the program activities.