What peer support initiatives are available to Australians with diabetes? A national audit.

Browne JL1,2, Baptista S1,2, Halliday JA1,2, Speight J1,2
1. The Australian Centre for Behavioural Research in Diabetes, Diabetes Victoria, Melbourne, VIC, Australia; 2. School of Psychology, Deakin University, Burwood, VIC, Australia

Background
- Peer support can have a positive impact on psychosocial and biomedical outcomes for people with diabetes.
- The 2011 Diabetes MILES - Australia study found that, of the Australian adults with diabetes who were not participating in peer support, 32% would like to.
- There is no repository of information about what diabetes peer support offerings are available in Australia, making it difficult to link with support initiatives.

Aim
- To collate information about what peer support initiatives are available in Australia, where they are, and how to access them.
- This audit was conducted as part of the National Diabetes Service Scheme (NDSS) National Development Program for Mental Health and Diabetes.

Method
- Internet searches were conducted to identify programs in each state/territory.
- Program characteristics (e.g. aims, participants, format, funding) were extracted from websites.
- Where possible, a contact person (e.g. program organiser) was identified and invited to participate in a structured telephone interview (N=37).
- Program documentation (e.g. training manuals, guidelines, policies) was requested from the interviewee, and further information was extracted where relevant.

Results
- The audit identified 261 diabetes peer support programs nationwide.
- Table 1 summarises the programs by type and state.
- Three quarters (202/261) of identified initiatives were community support groups. Most: 33 monthly, face-to-face; 33 are based in the eastern states of Australia; 33 many are administered by state and territory diabetes member organisations.
- 24 of the initiatives were camps for young people with type 1 diabetes.
- 33 of the initiatives were online: 15 Facebook groups, 12 chat forums, 1 Tweetchat (i.e. chat using Twitter); 3 other.
- Of the most active chat forums, all bar one were based overseas, (but used by Australians).
- 4 initiatives were formal programs developed and administered by companies or non-profit organisations.
- e.g. mentoring program run by JDRF.
- Table 2 provides more detail about selected, representative diabetes peer support initiatives.
- From the interviews, it was evident that: peer leader training and program evaluation were rare across all group types; short-term funding is a barrier to consistent service provision.

Table 1. Types of diabetes peer support initiatives in Australia, by state/territory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/territory</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Diabetes camps</th>
<th>Online initiatives</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Detailed description of a selection of representative Australian diabetes peer support initiatives.

Conclusions
- Face-to-face support groups that meet in a community setting are the most common form of diabetes peer support available in Australia. However:
  - few face-to-face support opportunities are available outside the eastern states
  - face-to-face support groups may not appeal to all demographics, and may not always be practical - especially in regional/natural areas
  - Technology-enabled diabetes peer support has the potential to fill these gaps. However:
    - more Australian-based online initiatives may be needed
    - more consideration should be given to the use of telephone, SMS, and application-based diabetes peer support
  - Identifying sustainable funding sources, ensuring peer leaders are trained and supported, routine evaluation are all important considerations for the future.
  - Access to diabetes peer support and up-to-date information about the available options needs to be more accessible for people with diabetes.

References