

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

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

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Background

- Peer support can have a positive impact on psychosocial and biomedical outcomes for people with diabetes.¹
- 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.²
- 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:
 - meet monthly, face-to-face;
 - are based in the eastern states of Australia
 - many are administered by state and territory diabetes member organisations
- 24 of the initiatives were camps for young people with type 1 diabetes.
- 31 of the initiatives were online.
 - 15 Facebook groups; 12 chat forums, 1 Tweekchat (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 Australian 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.

| State/territory | Community | Diabetes camps | Online initiatives | Other | Total |
|-----------------|------------|----------------|--------------------|----------|------------|
| ACT | 3 | 0 | 31 | 4 | N/A |
| NSW | 47 | 5 | | | |
| NT | 1 | 1 | | | |
| QLD | 52 | 6 | | | |
| SA | 0 | 2 | | | |
| TAS | 0 | 1 | | | |
| VIC | 84 | 7 | | | |
| WA | 15 | 2 | | | |
| Total | 202 | 24 | 31 | 4 | 261 |

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

| Face-to-face | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|--|--|-----------------------|
| Name | Organisation | State | Description | Participants | Funding | Evaluation |
| Peer Support Program | Diabetes Victoria | VIC | Each group chooses the mode and frequency of meeting, supported by Diabetes Victoria staff. There are approximately twice as many groups for people with type 2 compared to type 1 diabetes. Aim of program is to connect people with diabetes, and by doing so, improve diabetes management knowledge, skills, and confidence. | People with type 1 or type 2 diabetes (and occasionally, their families). Groups cater to either a particular geographic area, or to a particular demographic. Attendance not recorded, but can be as low as 30% at any given meeting. | Diabetes Victoria | No formal evaluation |
| Diabetes WA Children's Camps | Diabetes WA | WA | Combination of activities, education, and support. Held once per year for 8-10 year olds, and 11-13 year olds. Aims to assist the children to feel 'normal' by being surrounded by other children with diabetes. | Children with type 1 diabetes aged 8-13 years. Most camps accommodate ~40 children. | LotteryWest | No formal evaluation |
| Online | | | | | | |
| Name | Organisation | Description | | Participants | Funding | Evaluation |
| OzDOC Tweekchat | n/a | OzDOC (Diabetes Online Community) host and facilitate a weekly Tweekchat on Tuesday evenings. Aims to provide flexible and accessible diabetes peer support that is supportive and non-confrontational. | | Open to all people with diabetes worldwide (most participants Australian). 10-30 active participants each week. Attendance isn't recorded; both genders, all types of diabetes, and a range of geographical locations usually represented. | Largely unfunded; receives a small grant from Diabetes Victoria. | No formal evaluation. |
| Reality Check Forum | Type 1 Diabetes Network | Provides peer support through chat forums, which can be general discussion or focused on specific topics. Aims to create opportunities to share real-life experiences of living with type 1 diabetes, and make living with type 1 diabetes easier by providing support. | | Open to all people with diabetes worldwide (most participants Australian). Approximately 300 adults with type 1 diabetes active on the forum. | Largely unfunded; small amount of income through provision of advertising space in newsletter. | No formal evaluation. |

Enquiries

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NDSS Infoline 1300 136 588 ndss.com.au

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/rural 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

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