

Almost 70 per cent of people with diabetes find peer support helps their diabetes self management and around 25% are accessing peer support online.

A new report shows almost 70 per cent of Australians with diabetes find peer support helps their diabetes self management, improves their wellbeing, and helps them connect to health services.

“Peer support provides people with the opportunity to share knowledge, experience, emotions, ideas and concerns with other people with diabetes,” said Dr. Jessica Browne from the Australian Centre for Behavioural Research in Diabetes.

“Respondents in our study reported many benefits of peer support and those who were participating in initiatives were highly satisfied with the support they were receiving. It is clear that people would like to be able to access peer support at a time and a location that suits them and this may be driving the popularity of online peer support initiatives,” she said.

“While face to face group programs run by state and territory diabetes organisations are the most commonly used (around 44 per cent of respondents), 25 per cent were accessing programs using Facebook or online peer support.”

The new study, *Diabetes peer support in Australia: A National Survey*, is the first large-scale national survey into the experiences of, and preferences for, peer support in the lives of people with all types of diabetes.

“People with diabetes only have an average of 6-8 hours contact with health professionals in a year – so the majority of diabetes management is self management and that routine can be complex and unrelenting,” Dr Browne said.

“Peer support helps people to share the emotional burden of living with the condition and it can effectively supplement and reinforce the knowledge and expertise offered by health professionals and people can learn how to better access the services they need.”

Diabetes Australia CEO A/Professor Greg Johnson said the research highlighted the importance of peer support for people with diabetes and the important role of local diabetes organisations in coordinating peer support.

“Diabetes is the single biggest challenge confronting Australia’s health system and appropriately funded peer support programs are one tool we can use to improve health outcomes for people with all types of diabetes,” A/Professor Johnson said.

“The new *National Diabetes Strategy 2016-2010* released by the Minister for Health, Hon Sussan Ley late last year clearly outlines the need for enhanced peer support and recommends peer support should be accessible for all Australians with diabetes.”

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The researchers made five clear recommendations for optimising peer support programs to ensure the best possible outcomes for people with diabetes including:

- 1) Provide more online diabetes peer support initiatives
- 2) Increase engagement of men, people with less education and people with type 2 diabetes in peer support
- 3) Provide well-structured, expertly moderated/facilitated peer support initiatives
- 4) Increase promotion of existing diabetes peer support programs to improve awareness of, and access to and reach of programs
- 5) Improve awareness and understanding of diabetes peer support among health professionals.

Key results

- 11 per cent of people with diabetes currently participate in a diabetes peer support group, program or online community
- 38 per cent of people wish to participate in diabetes peer support in the future
- 26 per cent of people with type 1 diabetes access peer support through online forums
- 25 per cent of people with type 1 diabetes access peer support via Facebook groups
- 44 per cent of people with type 2 diabetes access support groups run by their local diabetes organisation
- 67 per cent of people said peer support was 'helpful' or 'very helpful' in connecting with healthcare services, 66 per cent said it was helpful with diabetes self management and 69 per cent said it was helpful with emotional well-being
- 20 per cent of people with type 1 diabetes said peer support helped them to 'make me feel like I'm not alone' (the most frequently endorsed benefit)
- 27 per cent of people with type 2 diabetes said access to diabetes information and resources and motivation to manage diabetes (equal most frequently endorsed benefit).

Note to editors:

- The Diabetes Peer Support in Australia Study was the first large-scale national survey of Australians with type 1 and type 2 diabetes about their perceptions, preferences and experiences of peer support.
- This survey was undertaken as a part of the NDSS Mental Health and Diabetes National Development Programme. It was developed in collaboration with the Australian Centre for Behavioural Research in Diabetes (ACBRD), a partnership for better health between Diabetes Victoria and Deakin University.
- The National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) is an initiative of the Australian Government, administered with the assistance of Diabetes Australia.

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- Mental health care for people with diabetes is recognised as a priority area in the **Australian National Diabetes Strategy 2016-2020**, see report here: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/nds-2016-2020>.
- Diabetes is a serious, progressive and complex condition, which can result in serious complications.

Diabetes Australia is the national body for people affected by all types of diabetes and those at risk. Diabetes Australia is committed to reducing the impact of diabetes. We work in partnership with diabetes health professionals, researchers and the community to minimise the impact of diabetes.

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