

Saturday forum

email: editor@examiner.com.au sms: 04274 FORUM phone: 0363 367111 fax: 0363 347328

MILESTONES THIS WEEK

- **HANDED:** Brisbane, the rights to the G20 leaders' summit in 2014.
- **ANNOUNCED:** The 420-strong Australian team for the London Olympic Games, the smallest contingent since the 1992 Barcelona Games.
- **PLACED:** Chocolate giant Darrell Lea into voluntary administration.
- **RETIRED:** Australian cricket great Brett Lee from international matches.

Safeguard our children from global 'diabesity' epidemic

By GUY BARNETT, Diabetes Australia and Diabetes Tasmania ambassador. National diabetes week runs from July 8-14.



AN AGEING population and the highest levels of obesity and chronic disease in the country all work against us in Tasmania.

Diabetes Tasmania's call for government funding of type 2 diabetes prevention will save millions of dollars in healthcare costs. The annual cost for treating type 2 diabetes is already \$6 billion. With no action, this figure is expected to quadruple by 2050.

More than 40,000 Tasmanians already have diagnosed or undiagnosed type 2 diabetes, which is sometimes referred to as a "lifestyle" disease. The fuse to this time bomb has been lit with another 45,000 Tasmanians having pre-diabetes, meaning they have a high risk of type 2 diabetes.

Diabetes remains the leading cause of heart attacks, strokes, blindness, limb amputation and

kidney failure. Obese people are four times more likely to develop diabetes.

Conversely, type 2 diabetes can be delayed or prevented altogether by up to 60 per cent through adopting a healthy active lifestyle.

A recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report on diabetes said 72 per cent of Australians did not get enough exercise; 90 per cent did not eat enough vegetables and 50 per cent did not eat enough fruit. Diabetes is now Australia's fastest growing chronic disease.

The "diabesity" epidemic has gone global. China has nearly 100 million people with type 2 diabetes and India 51 million.

Rapid economic growth has brought millions out of poverty, but with it came access to energy-dense food high in salt, sugar and fat, televisions and technology, sedentary lives at work and at home, improved but "non-active" transport and more urban living. Western lifestyles, like the internet, have gone viral.

Of the estimated 366-million people with diabetes in the world, 4.6 million die from the disease each year; one person every seven seconds, more than double the deaths from AIDS and malaria.

Global healthcare expenditure on

diabetes in 2011 was \$465 billion, equal to 11 per cent of total health spending. But healthcare costs are one thing. The cost to the economy is another.

An Access Economics report commissioned by Diabetes Australia estimated the cost of obesity in Australia at \$58 billion a year; \$8thbillion in direct health costs and the remainder in indirect, lost productivity and other costs.

It costs the Tasmanian economy \$1 billion a year. This worsening tragedy is preventable.

Targets are used for cutting carbon emissions: they should also be used to safeguard our children's health. Children's health and fitness should be benchmarked, just like we do for literacy and numeracy.

These results will be vital to designing healthy, active initiatives.

Healthy eating habits are critical for our children. Only healthy food should be sold through our school canteens and childcare centres.

Education programs on nutritional health and improved advertising standards directed at better eating habits are necessary.

It is estimated that increasing fruit and vegetable consumption by one serve a day will save the Australian health system \$157

million a year in relation to heart disease alone.

Diabetes Tasmania's evidence-based "The Coach" program has delivered better health outcomes for its 400-plus participants.

Other initiatives include a voucher system to encourage sport participation, more healthy school breakfasts and lunches, vegetable gardens and cooking classes.

The Productivity Commission report reveals Tasmania's health spending of \$5276 a person is 4 per cent below the national average. We smoke more and die younger than other Australians.

If vending machines don't offer healthy options, they should be removed. Water should be made available and encouraged at school and in the workplace. Restaurants should include nutritional information on their menus.

Sadly, the majority of the recommendations from the Australian government's National Preventative Health Taskforce Report have not been implemented. They need to be.

To assess your risk of diabetes and support the prevention campaign go to www.letspreventdiabetes.org.au.

■ Dinah Arndt, The Examiner's chief political reporter, is on leave.



Capital claim

THE main road approaches to Townsville boast large signs proclaiming "Queensland's Northern Capital".

Perhaps similar appropriate signs around Launceston might help to diminish the arrogance of our Southern public service and political outpost.

— PAT STRIDE, Sidmouth.

Tight lipped

THE way the Gillard government studiously refused to mention the carbon tax in its recent Household Assistance Package is much like a little child shutting its eyes tightly to make the Bogeyman go away.

— RALPH B. MOGFORD, Sheffield.

Post procedure

A LETTER posted in St Helens, addressed to a St Helens resident, goes all the way to Hobart and back again for delivery two days later. Hmmm, a tad inefficient wouldn't you say?

— SUE TURALE, St Helens.

INTERNET POLL
THIS WEEK'S RESULTS 252 votes

Do you think Simon Overland is the right person for the Justice Department job?

YES 36.1%