

# talkingpoint

## Tassie must defuse diabetes time bomb

TYPE 2 diabetes is a preventable pandemic.

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

Government support for Type 2 diabetes prevention will provide massive savings in health costs and for the economy.

There are 38,000 Tasmanians who 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 are at 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 by 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.

### It is time for Tasmania to fight a diabetes pandemic, warns Guy Barnett

Diabetes is now Australia's fastest-growing chronic disease. Australia's annual health cost for Type 2 diabetes is already \$6 billion, and is tipped to rise to \$18 billion by 2025.

The "diabetes" 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 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.

Of the estimated 366 million people with diabetes in the world, 4.6 million die from the disease each year, being one person every seven seconds.

Global health care expenditure on diabetes in 2011 totalled \$US465 billion, equal to 11 per cent of total health spending. But health care costs

are one thing. The cost to the economy is another.

An Access Economics report commissioned by Diabetes Australia and released at one of my Healthy Lifestyle Forums to Help Combat Childhood Obesity, estimated the cost of obesity in Australia at \$58 billion per year, with \$8 billion in direct health costs and the remainder in indirect, lost productivity and other costs. It costs the Tasmanian economy \$1 billion per year.

This worsening tragedy is preventable. Detection and early intervention is the way to go.

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. Sugary, fizzy drinks should be banned. Education programs on nutritional health and improved advertising standards directed at better eating habits are necessary.

It is estimated that increasing fruit



**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** Healthy eating is critical for children.

and vegetable consumption by just one serve per day will save the Australian health system \$157 million per year in relation to heart disease.

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

Other initiatives include establishing a voucher system to encourage participation in sport across the community, more healthy school breakfasts and lunches, vegetable gardens and cooking

classes. The State Government has cut hard into our health services when the Productivity Commission report reveals Tasmania's health spending of \$5276 per 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. Takeaways and restaurants should include nutritional information in store or on their menus.

Most of the recommendations from the Australian Government's National Preventative Health Taskforce Report have not been implemented. They need to be. The Australian Government made obesity a national health priority two years after I first recommended it, but not enough has been done. It is time that Australia established a national diabetes prevention program.

To assess your risk of diabetes and support prevention campaigns, go to [www.letspreventdiabetes.org.au](http://www.letspreventdiabetes.org.au)

● Guy Barnett is Diabetes Australia and Diabetes Tasmania Ambassador. He is also a former Tasmanian Liberal senator.