

Tough fight to reduce diabetes

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LAUNCESTON diabetes dietitian Tracey Tasker has a blunt analogy to illustrate the challenge for the state in its fight to reduce epidemic proportions of Tasmanians developing type 2 diabetes .

“It's a real battle to effect the choices people make about their diets when a litre of coca cola costs less than a litre of milk," she says.

Tasmania recorded 25,914 people diagnosed with some form of diabetes this year, according to Diabetes Australia.

That was an 8 per cent growth in sufferers since the last statistics were collected in 2002 which was modest compared to other states.

But Diabetes Tasmania spokeswoman Carmen Jenkinson said that it was no reason to relax the battle to beat the chronic disease.

The biggest concern for health professionals is the staggering growth in the number of Australians developing type 2 diabetes.

“Tasmania's lower than national growth of diagnosed type 2 diabetes unfortunately indicates a likelihood of a high rate of undiagnosed cases," Ms Jenkinson said.

“There is nothing to suggest that Tasmania has made advances in the reduction of modifiable or non-modifiable risk factors for developing type 2 diabetes that would explain this figure."

Diabetes Australia ambassador and former Tasmanian Senator Guy Barnett said that diabetes was the country's fastest growing chronic disease.

“Numbers (of sufferers) are set to double in the next 20 years if nothing is done," he said.

Mr Barnett said that the frustrating thing about diabetes type 2 was that it could be prevented or helped considerably by a good diet and exercise.

Type 1 diabetes occurs when the pancreas is unable to make enough insulin and is usually diagnosed in childhood or young adulthood. It is not related to lifestyle.

But type 2 diabetes has risk factors such as age, nationality and a family history of diabetes which can be reduced by maintaining a healthy diet and exercise.

“The recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report on diabetes said that 72 per cent of Australians did not get enough exercise, 90 per cent did not get enough vegetables and 50 per cent did not eat enough fruit," Mr Barnett said.