

# National Diabetes Education Program

By John West

Closing the Gap, Diabetes • February/March 1999

Today, more Americans than ever suffer from various forms of diabetes, and the resulting rates of death and serious complications—like adult blindness, kidney disease and foot or leg amputations—are especially high for racial and ethnic minority populations.

Yet knowledge can go a long way in helping to prevent such outcomes. People who monitor their blood sugar regularly and maintain it within recommended levels can add years to their lives and greatly improve its quality.

That's why the National Diabetes Education Program, or NDEP, is aggressively taking its first public message, "Control Your Diabetes. For Life," to minority communities.

Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States. Of the almost 16 million people who have diabetes, one-third go undiagnosed because diabetes is generally asymptomatic until complications develop.

Diabetes is also one of the most expensive health problems in the U.S., costing \$98 billion a year or 13 percent of the total spent for U.S. health care, according to the November 1998 *National Diabetes Fact Sheet* from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It is the leading cause of adult blindness and end-stage renal disease in the U.S. People with diabetes are five times more likely to have heart disease. It can also lead to many other health problems.

Started in 1997 as a public-private partnership, NDEP aims to improve the treatment and outcomes for people with diabetes. It is also designed to promote early diagnosis, and ultimately, to prevent the onset of diabetes.

NDEP is sponsored jointly by National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the CDC. "The CDC and NIH partnership has been a one-of-its-kind success story of two major federal agencies working very closely together to sponsor a national education initiative on diabetes," said Faye L. Wong, Associate Director for Diabetes Education, Division of Diabetes Translation, CDC and co-project director of NDEP.

According to Wong, both entities bring their collective strengths of expertise, resources and partners to the table. "Working together, we are blending our strengths and accomplishing more than we would have alone in sponsoring a program as complex and extensive as the NDEP," she added.

NDEP's goal is to reduce the illness and numbers of deaths associated with diabetes and its complications, and to raise the same awareness for diabetes that has been done for hypertension and cholesterol in the past.

Since public awareness about diabetes was very low, the first goal of the NDEP was to inform patients with diabetes about the disease's complications. The message to the patient and general public was kept simple and stressed that diabetes is a serious, common, and costly disease, yet controllable.

Last June, NDEP launched its first awareness campaign, "Control Your Diabetes. For Life." The event and campaign messages received major coverage in national and local media outlets across the country. The goal of this ongoing awareness campaign is to encourage people with diabetes to manage their disease.

"People with diabetes benefit from getting consistent messages from multiple sources everywhere they go," Wong said. "Numerous partners are involved at every level of the NDEP and are delivering the NDEP messages locally, in communities, where people live and work," she added.

Wong also pointed out that minority organizations have been full partners of the NDEP from the very beginning of planning the program.

"We heard early on that many national programs are not successful because the people who know the minority populations the best were not actively engaged in identifying the needs, developing the messages, materials or strategies, or delivering the program," she said.

The NDEP has four minority work groups: Hispanic/Latino, African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Asian American/Pacific Islander.

These work groups have been deeply engaged in directing and developing the component of the NDEP unique for their respective populations.

The Hispanic/Latino component of the "Control Your Diabetes. For Life." campaign began in June 1998 and emphasized—in Spanish language—that diabetes is serious, yet controllable. By the end of September 1998, print and broadcast news stories had reached audiences of almost 12.5 million Hispanics and Latinos in the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

The African American component began with a press briefing during the Congressional Black Caucus' annual meeting last September in Washington, D.C. At that briefing, Surgeon General David Satcher called diabetes "an epidemic" within the African American community.

"The number of African Americans diagnosed with diabetes has tripled over the past 30 years," Dr. Satcher said. "The NDEP is a key strategy of the Presidential Initiative on Race, which is designed to improve the health status of America's racial and ethnic populations, including African Americans" he added.

During his remarks, Dr. Satcher called on all African Americans with diabetes to work with their health care providers to manage their disease.

"African Americans experience higher and more devastating rates of diabetes complications including eye disease, kidney failure, amputations, and premature deaths than Caucasians," according to Marcus Wilson, MD, national medical director of the Mutual of Omaha Company. "It is crucial that we treat this disease as an epidemic and inform everyone about the long-term benefits of controlling diabetes," Dr. Wilson said during the press briefing.

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NDEP Steering Committee Co-Director Joanne Gallivan, MS, RD, director of NIDDK's Diabetes Outreach and Education Programs, said plans are underway for additional components of "Control Your Diabetes. For Life." These campaigns, to be launched this year, will target American Indians/Alaska Natives and Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders.

"Our priority this year is to complete and introduce the targeted minority awareness campaigns and community intervention kit, and to continue expansion of the NDEP Partnerships Network nationally," Gallivan said.

These minority awareness campaigns will include products for TV, radio and print public service announcements, posters, brochures, and media kits. "In our view, anyone and everyone in a community can get involved and make a contribution," Wong said.

Community intervention kits have been put together that contain numerous ideas, how-to guidelines and tools for partners to use in planning and implementing simple diabetes awareness activities and programs to support people with diabetes.

Many of NDEP's materials developed for the "Control Your Diabetes. For Life" campaign are now available on the campaign's Web site, <http://ndep.nih.gov>.

As NDEP develops, additional efforts will focus on:

- people with undiagnosed diabetes and their families;
- health care providers;
- health care payers, purchasers and policymakers.

NDEP continues to build partnerships for support of diabetes awareness and education to the targeted audiences. By identifying voluntary organizations and private companies as potential partners, NDEP "brokers" the collaboration of collective efforts in diabetes education, prevention and treatment.

According to Wong, it is through these partnerships that NDEP constantly strives to develop a sense of future diabetes and health education program plans, exploring new ways to continually establish and exploit mutually beneficial partnerships to help eliminate diabetes.

"Our role is to bring together diverse partners nationally to develop the vision, goals, objectives, priorities, messages, strategies, guidelines, tools and national partnerships for the program," Wong said.

As for the future of the NDEP, Wong feels that strong partnership ties will make the difference. "The full engagement of our minority partners has resulted in a strong band of mutual trust, respect, commitment and friendship that will help NDEP make a difference in the lives of people with diabetes," she said.

*For more information on NDEP or on how to get involved in your community, call 1-800-438-5383; or visit their Web site at <http://ndep.nih.gov>.* ❖

