

## Facts taken from a New Zealand Herald article on 7 December 2018

# Diabetes - the Pacific 'tsunami':

This Christmas, the Herald and The Fred Hollows Foundation NZ are working together to bring the Gift of Sight to the Pacific, where four out of five people who are blind don't need to be. Alarming, an increasing number of these are young people, suffering from diabetes-related eye disease.

- Diabetes has been described as "a tsunami" that is overwhelming healthcare systems in the Pacific Islands.
- Seven of the 10 countries with the highest rates of the disease are in the Pacific.
- The highest is the Marshall Islands where 33 per cent of people aged between 20 and 79 have diabetes.
- In October, the *Herald* spent a week with the Fred Hollows Foundation in Vanuatu where 21 per cent of the population have been diagnosed with the disease.
- The rates in other Pacific countries in which the charity works are Kiribati, 28 per cent; Samoa, 24 per cent; Tonga, 19 per cent; Fiji, 16 per cent; Papua New Guinea, 14 per cent; Solomon Islands, 13 per cent.
- Diabetes is part of the broader problem of non-communicable diseases - heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases - that cause about 70 per cent of all deaths, says public health specialist Robert Beaglehole.
- Diabetes increases the risk of dying from heart disease, stroke and kidney failure.  
In New Zealand, more than 240,000 people have been diagnosed with diabetes while the Ministry of Health estimates another 100,000 have the disease. Taken together that is about 7 per cent of the population.
- During the past 20 years there has been an explosion of this disease, particularly in the Pacific Islands where the incidence is among the highest in the world.
- High blood sugar can lead to cataracts, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy which is the most common

### Diabetes Facts

- The number of people in the world with diabetes has nearly quadrupled since 1980.
- It is increasing most rapidly in low- and middle-income countries.
- 7 of the 10 countries with the highest incidence of diabetes are in the Pacific.

- The causes are complex, but the rise of Type 2 diabetes - the most common form - is linked to obesity, diet and insufficient exercise.
- Diabetes of all types can lead to complications in many parts of the body and increase the risk of premature death.
- A large proportion of diabetes and its complications can be prevented by a healthy diet, regular exercise, maintaining a normal body weight and avoiding tobacco use.

Source: World Health Organisation

### **Diabetes and blindness**

- Diabetic retinopathy is the most common cause of vision loss among people with diabetes and a leading cause of blindness among working-age adults.
- Diabetic retinopathy involves changes to retinal blood vessels that can cause them to bleed or leak fluid, distorting vision.
- Other diabetic eye diseases include diabetic macular oedema (swelling to an area of the retina), cataract and glaucoma.

Source: <https://nei.nih.gov/health/diabetic/retinopathy>