

Diabetes in Asia and the Pacific: Implications for the Global Epidemic

The last three decades have witnessed an epidemic rise in the number of people with diabetes, especially type 2 diabetes, and particularly in developing countries, where more than 80% of the people with diabetes live. The rise of type 2 diabetes in South Asia is estimated to be more than 150% between 2000 and 2035. Although aging, urbanization, and associated lifestyle changes are the major determinants for the rapid increase, an adverse intrauterine environment and the resulting epigenetic changes could also contribute in many developing countries. The International Diabetes Federation estimated that there were 382 million people with diabetes in 2013, a number surpassing its earlier predictions. More than 60% of the people with diabetes live in Asia, with almost one-half in China and India combined. The Western Pacific, the world's most populous region, has more than 138.2 million people with diabetes, and the number may rise to 201.8 million by 2035. The scenario poses huge social and economic problems to most nations in the region and could impede national and, indeed, global development. More action is required to understand the drivers of the epidemic to provide a rationale for prevention strategies to address the rising global public health "tsunami." Unless drastic steps are taken through national prevention programs to curb the escalating trends in all of the countries, the social, economic, and health care challenges are likely to be insurmountable.