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Why diabetes has an image problem that hurts

The Foundation Director of Australia's leading behavioural research centre in diabetes (ACBRD), Professor Jane Speight today presented to the 82nd Scientific Sessions of the American Diabetes Association on how harmful diabetes stigma can be to people living with this serious condition.

Professor Speight explained to the global audience, "Diabetes has an image problem – and it is caused by the imagery and the language used, which perpetuates a stigma attached to the condition".

Professor Speight, and her colleagues at the Australian Centre for Behavioural Research in Diabetes (ACBRD) have undertaken world-leading research over the past decade into the issue of diabetes stigma. Their research shows four in five people with diabetes have experienced some form of stigma.

"We also know that what goes with diabetes stigma is isolation, lower emotional well-being, fewer HbA1c checks, fewer clinic visits, lower quality collaboration and this ultimately impacts on the continuity of care people receive," said Professor Speight.

"We know of people with diabetes who haven't even told their partners or other family members because they are ashamed of having diabetes. Some people internalise the stigma and blame themselves. They feel they must hide their diabetes to avoid rejection and judgement. This has a major impact on their ability to manage their diabetes well around other people.

Diabetes stigma is a global problem, and there are increasing international efforts to address the issue.

Professor Speight said, "It is impossible to make real progress in diabetes care and outcomes without correcting the image problem and removing diabetes stigma".

"We need more calls for action, research, strategy, attention to language, improvements in clinical care and increased advocacy, now."

Diabetes is the fastest-growing chronic condition in Australia, with around 80 Victorians developing diabetes every day.

Diabetes Victoria CEO Glen Noonan said, "Diabetes Victoria is proud to have supported the important work of Professor Speight and her colleagues at the ACBRD, as a partnership with Deakin University over the past 12 years. Together with Diabetes Australia, we fund vital research across all aspects of all types of diabetes to reduce its impact on all people living with diabetes, and their families".

For more information visit: www.diabetesvic.org.au or acbrd.org.au

Media enquiries: Annette Glenister – Media & External Relations Manager, 0400 772 722

Diabetes Victoria

570 Elizabeth Street. Melbourne VIC 3000
comms@diabetesvic.org.au

