



**For Immediate Release:**

August 6, 2007

## **Diabetes Epidemic Continues To Grow in Los Angeles County** Latest Public Health Survey Shows Adult Cases Have Increased 30% in the Past 8 Years

LOS ANGELES – The rate of diabetes among adults in Los Angeles County continues to rise, according to the most recent Los Angeles County Public Health Survey. In 1997, 6.6% of adult residents in LA County reported having a diabetes diagnosis, but in 2005 this number increased to 8.6%, or approximately 600,000 adults.

“The growing number of persons with diabetes is particularly tragic because the most common form of this disease, type 2 diabetes, can often be prevented through maintaining a healthy weight and an active lifestyle,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “Public Health is committed to reducing diabetes rates in Los Angeles County through advocating for availability of affordable, healthy food choices in low income areas, such as the Farmer’s Market in Watts and the community garden in South LA, for establishing healthy food policies, working with LAUSD and other school systems to improve nutrition and increase physical activity, promoting physical activity for all children and adults, and supporting legislation to require fast food restaurants to put calories right up on the order boards next to the pictures of the different food items.”

The survey findings include diabetes rates among Latinos and African Americans were nearly double those of whites and Asians/Pacific Islanders. In addition, from 1997 to 2005, the rate of diabetes increased most rapidly among those living in poverty and was more than two times higher in this group than among those with incomes at or above the federal poverty level.

“We need to not only stop the continuing increase in this serious disease, we need to reduce the disparities so that the disease burden does not fall disproportionately on specific groups,” said Fielding.

"These findings should serve as a wake-up call to every single resident in the County of Los Angeles," said Board of Supervisors Chairman Zev Yaroslavsky. "I know from personal experience that when I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes in 2001, you can manage and control the disease through diet and exercise. The consequences of neglecting this disease are extremely serious, including blindness, amputation, kidney failure, heart attack, and stroke."

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Overweight and obesity both increase the risk for type 2 diabetes, the major form of the disease in adults. Among adults with diabetes in LA County, 41% were obese, based on self-reported height and weight. Between 1997 and 2005, the percent of obese adults in the County increased from 14% to 21%, contributing to the diabetes epidemic.

The cost of diabetes is high, both to individuals and their families, and to society. In LA County, medical costs and costs associated with lost productivity in the workplace due to diabetes were estimated to be \$5.6 billion in 2005. Those with diabetes are at increased risk for heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, blindness, and blood circulation problems that can lead to limb amputation. These complications can often be prevented or significantly delayed with appropriate medical care and self-management by the patient.

The high numbers reported in the survey likely underestimate the true burden of diabetes in the County because the survey was based on persons who reported that they had been diagnosed with diabetes. National studies indicate that approximately one-third of those with diabetes do not know they have the disease, and the percentage of those with undiagnosed diabetes in LA County could be as high as or higher than national estimates.

Diabetes is a chronic illness that can be controlled through appropriate medical care and self-care. Health insurance and regular access to high quality medical services are critical for effective management of the disease. Most important is preventing the disease itself. Public Health has recommended a multi-level strategy that addresses behavioral changes at both the community and individual level. Some examples of these are:

- Establishing policies for municipal programs and facilities to increase opportunities for healthy eating, such as stocking county vending machines with nutritious snacks and drinks.
- Increasing the availability of affordable, nourishing food choices at corner stores and supermarkets, especially in low-income neighborhoods.
- Encouraging restaurants to provide nutrition information on their menus.
- Encouraging the development of parks, other open spaces, and walkable communities that promote physical activity.
- Encouraging physical activity and nutrition education in elementary, middle, and high schools, and enforcing physical education requirements.
- Educating patients at community clinics and hospitals about diabetes prevention and management.
- Expanding community outreach to increase access to health-care services among those that do not have health insurance.

A full copy of the report can be found on the Public Health Web site at:  
<http://lapublichealth.org/ha/index.htm>.

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# Public Health News

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