

# The Diabetes Update

A bi-monthly newsletter introducing new people, projects and progress in the world of diabetes health

**No. 6 April 2016**

**Welcome** to the sixth issue of *The Diabetes Update*. The newsletter tells you about the national direction for diabetes, the work programme and shares innovative stories from around New Zealand.

Please feel free to share the newsletter far and wide. If you would like to receive an email when each new issue is released, or if you want to share a story in the newsletter, email [cvddiabetes@moh.govt.nz](mailto:cvddiabetes@moh.govt.nz) putting 'subscribe me' in the subject line.

## Diabetes Day 2016

The Ministry is holding Diabetes Day again in 2016. This is a chance for DHBs, PHOs and clinicians to come together and discuss diabetes services, new innovations and the challenges the sector is facing. This year Diabetes Day will be held to coincide with the New Zealand Society for the Study of Diabetes (NZSSD) annual conference.

The day is being held on 2 May 2016, in Rotorua, and registrations are now open. Further information will be made available once we have confirmed an agenda for the day.

## Self-management support updated guidance

The Ministry has recently released an updated paper on self-management support. While this paper is for Long Term Conditions (LTCs) generally it is relevant for diabetes as well. Supporting people with LTCs to manage their conditions becomes more important as the population ages and people are increasingly managing more than one condition.

This paper was developed as the result of three sector workshops in 2015 to share best practice and innovation for the primary and community health sectors. It includes definitions of key terms related to LTCs, as well as links to examples of current work in New Zealand. It has been written as a background paper for funders, planners and practitioners in New Zealand. Appendix 3 contains diabetes specific additional information.

Any self-management support must:

- be appropriate for the person with the LTC and their family and whānau
- be developed in partnership with the person with the LTC
- focus on reducing inequities in health.

The new guidance can be found at [www.health.govt.nz/publication/self-management-support-people-long-term-conditions](http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/self-management-support-people-long-term-conditions)

# Update of the Virtual Diabetes Register

With the release of the five year diabetes plan, *Living Well with Diabetes* (the Plan), the Ministry is seeking to establish measures, and a baseline of those measures, to show progress in achieving the Plan. As a part of this work we are undertaking a project to update the Virtual Diabetes Register (VDR).

The VDR is used to estimate the diabetes population in New Zealand. It is collated annually using data up to 31 December of the previous year. The VDR uses data extracted from five national collections (refined using a number of algorithms).

The Ministry is currently working with a group of experts to update the VDR to improve sensitivity and specificity. This work will help the Ministry to more accurately estimate the diabetes population, and their outcomes. We will continue to update you all as this work progresses. The changes will not affect the VDR 2015, which should be available for you in May 2016.

The VDR from earlier years is available at [www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/diabetes/about-diabetes/virtual-diabetes-register-vdr](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/diabetes/about-diabetes/virtual-diabetes-register-vdr)

## Release of Retinal Screening Guidelines

The *Diabetic Retinal Screening, Grading, monitoring and Referral Guidance* has been published on the Ministry website. It will be followed in the coming weeks by three associated resources for consumers, primary care and midwives. Dissemination of the package through the Ministry website, professional networks, associations and NGOs is intended to take place in the months leading up to the annual Diabetes Day Conference the NZSSD annual conference.

Key updates include:

- a revised screening interval and updated retinal screening pathway
- informing people that dilation is a choice
- central coordination for each regional screening service with additional monitoring by an optometrist and ophthalmologist service oversight
- providing screening and monitoring results within three weeks to the person with diabetes, their GP and referring clinician
- undertaking collection and storage of a core national minimum data set for analysis and quality improvement purposes.

The updated guidance can be found on our website at [www.health.govt.nz/publication/diabetic-retinal-screening-grading-monitoring-and-referral-guidance](http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/diabetic-retinal-screening-grading-monitoring-and-referral-guidance)

# The SMS4BG project

In late 2015 the Ministry supported the SMS4BG project. Our interest was to explore if a remote, text based, self help option could work for rural and remote New Zealand as well as it has for Waitemata DHB. As you all know access to health care is not great for some communities and mobile phone use is relatively high (if there is coverage). The *Living Well with Diabetes* plan has an explicit desire to explore new technologies and encourage self-management.

The SMS4BG has been developed with a robust methodology so we can see what impact it has. The team offering the program are very keen to make things as simple as possible for providers. Using technology in innovative ways for long term conditions is something we should be all aspiring to.

The inclusion criteria are:

- Aged 16 years or over
- Have type 1 or type 2 diabetes
- Have an HbA1c > 65mmol/ml within the preceding 9 months (ie, latest HbA1c test result)
- Able to read English
- Own a mobile phone

Please encourage all your contacts to consider this service as part of the suite of options on offer to people with diabetes. This is not the only option but we do know for optimal behaviour change people do need a variety of options.

Contact Rosie for more information or better yet just start referring.

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## Patient portals great tool for monitoring blood sugar

Patient portals can be an extremely useful tool for people who need to monitor their blood sugar frequently. Blood sugar levels can be uploaded to the portal and will be shown as a graph so you can see how your blood sugar is tracking over days and weeks and adjust your insulin accordingly. Your doctor and nurse can also see this information and use it to work with you to best manage your diabetes.

Portals are also useful for people with higher blood sugar levels but who do not have diabetes, as 61-year-old Margaret found out recently. →



Margaret, from Wellington, considered she was living a pretty healthy lifestyle. 'I'm slightly overweight – which I'm working on – and was doing regular exercise.' So finding out her blood sugar was high came as something of a shock.

'I'd recently registered with my general practice to use the patient portal they offer,' says Margaret. 'When I logged in for the first time I was really surprised to see my blood sugar was at pre-diabetic levels. I had expected my cholesterol might be a bit high, but not my blood sugar.'

Margaret says even though this news was a shock, she would much rather know, so she can take action. And that's where the portal came in.

'I wish I'd found out earlier so I could have made changes then. But now I do know, I've increased the exercise I do and I'm being even more careful about what I eat – for example, natural muesli rather than toasted.'

She plans to keep using the patient portal as a way of monitoring her blood sugar, cholesterol levels and blood pressure.

'Seeing your results online just makes it a bit more "in your face". You are more motivated and think "I can do something to change this".'

Margaret encourages people whose general practice offers a portal to sign up. 'Having access to your information really helps you be in charge of your own health.'

Patient portals are increasingly being offered by general practices around New Zealand – over 270 practices at latest count. As Margaret's story shows, as well as helping manage existing conditions, they can also help you stay well.

Portals are a bit like online banking for your health. They are a secure, way to help you to manage and keep track of your health 24/7. You can use a patient portal to book appointments with your GP or practice nurse, access your medical history, clinical notes (if these are available), lab results and to monitor any current diagnosis. You can even request prescription repeats.

To sign up for a patient portal, first talk to your GP to see if their practice is offering the service. If it is, they will then get you set up with a secure username and password.

You can find out more about patient portals at [healthitboard.health.govt.nz/patient-portals](http://healthitboard.health.govt.nz/patient-portals)



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Thanks for reading. We look forward to keeping you in touch.

On behalf of the Diabetes Team at the Ministry of Health:

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Feedback/suggestions to: [cvddiabetes@moh.govt.nz](mailto:cvddiabetes@moh.govt.nz)