Time to win the war on diabetes in Hawai'i

The statistics are sobering; the personal stories both inspiring and heart-wrenching. Hawai‘i is waging a crucial battle with diabetes. Winning that fight will take education and a solid commitment to a healthier lifestyle.

The stakes are high. As Advertiser writer Christie Wilson reports in a five-part series, state Department of Health statistics show 57 percent of adults in Hawai‘i are either overweight or obese — a major risk factor for diabetes. And the results are often devastating, if not deadly. Type 2 diabetes, the most common form of the disease, can cause serious health complications including strokes, kidney failure and blindness. Many who have type 2 diabetes may not even know it, because there are often no symptoms associated with the disease. Wilson’s report shows, while 271 deaths here were directly attributed to diabetes, health officials estimate 900 more die annually from diabetes-related causes.

Type 1 diabetes, which accounts for 5 to 10 percent of diabetes cases here, results from the body’s inability to produce insulin. Failing to manage blood-sugar levels in these cases can cause coma and even death.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 7.8 percent of the U.S. population — 23.6 million people — has diabetes. In Hawai‘i, that number is roughly 8 percent, or 102,000.

Sadly, the lifestyle changes that can make all the difference in managing and fending off diabetes often don’t occur until disaster hits in the form of a heart attack, stroke or hypertension-related diseases.

It’s time to change that course. Getting information out to our communities, particularly those most affected, is key. The state’s Healthy Hawai‘i Initiative, which includes an information campaign and policies pushing for healthier food choices in public schools, is a solid start.

And while legislating healthy habits is difficult, other cities have moved in the right direction with regulations on trans fats, better nutritional labeling on food products and policies discouraging junk food. State lawmakers should be paying attention.

For our part, the solution seems easy: eat healthier, smaller-sized portions; exercise. But old habits die hard.

Still, give it a try. Making these changes today could save your life.

In your voice

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