

**THE DIABETES EPIDEMIC: A NYS HEALTH CARE CHALLENGE**  
 by Catherine M. Abate



Diabetes is primarily known as a disease of the elderly. However, it is a problem that can affect everyone from infants through seniors – and the rates of those diagnosed with diabetes are getting worse. Diabetes kills more people than AIDS and breast cancer combined. It can lead to blindness, kidney failure, heart failure and strokes.

Since 1980, the prevalence of diabetes in New York State has doubled in the last 16 years and affects Blacks and Latinos disproportionately. Diabetes-related costs in New York are estimated at \$12.9 billion annually.

Nationwide, some 25.8 million children and adults have diabetes, of which one-third are undiagnosed and an astounding 79 million are pre-diabetic.

Here are additional staggering statistics:

- 11.3% of all people over 20 have diabetes.
- 26.9% of people over 65 have it.
- Minorities have a higher chance of contracting diabetes; in NYS, 12.1% of blacks have diabetes, compared to 7.7 of whites.
- Experts say nearly one-third of all Americans born in 2000 will have diabetes by 2050.

In New York State, nearly 4.2 million people – more than 20% of the state’s population – are pre-diabetic and at risk for the chronic condition that exacts an enormous human and financial toll, affecting everything from individual health to the state budget.

In 2008, NYSHealth Foundation launched a 5-year, \$36 million campaign to reverse the diabetes epidemic in New York – a campaign that focuses on improving clinical care, mobilizing communities and promoting health education.

The Business and Labor Coalition of New York (BALCONY) has proposed a Diabetes Education Prevention Program that could be modeled on NYHealth’s YMCA initiative, which offers sessions on healthy diets, exercise and behavioral changes.

The response has been great. We have preliminary participation interest from the New York State United Teachers, CWA Local 1180, the State Labor Health Care Alliance, the Greater New York Chamber of Commerce, the Pharmacists Society of

New York, CWA Local 1180 Humana, CDPHP, and UnitedHealthCare.

BALCONY is working with Reverend Michel Faulkner of the Institute For Leadership (IFL) to offer their Diabetes Prevention Program in New York to our members. The IFL has established a statewide faith-based Diabetes Consortium that has engaged some 875,000 people from 4,123 congregations. Kenneth Thorpe, head of the Health, Policy and Management Department at Emory University, states that community-based diabetes programs run locally by YMCAs should be expanded nationwide. These programs offer intensive lifestyle changes aimed at achieving a 7% weight loss among overweight adults who do not have diabetes. BALCONY strongly encourages lawmakers and health providers at city, state and national levels to look into ways to combat a Diabetes epidemic that affects so many of us. It truly is a matter of life or death.

The Community Healthcare Network (CHN) has a solid commitment to caring for individuals of all ages who are diabetic or pre-diabetic. Our health centers have received NCOA (National Committee of Quality Assurance) Diabetes Recognition for consistently providing high quality care. In addition, for the past two years we have partnered with the Family Center and the Brooklyn YMCA to provide educational workshops and access to health care for individuals and their families living with diabetes. This has provided us with first-hand experience on the value of collaborating with the local YMCA.

Community Healthcare Network (CHN) is a not-for-profit organization that provides access to affordable, culturally-competent and comprehensive community-based primary care, mental health and social services for diverse populations in underserved communities throughout NYC. CHN serves more than

75,000 individuals a year who would otherwise have little or no access to critical health care. CHN is composed of eleven federally qualified health centers and one mobile health unit.



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