



International  
Diabetes  
Federation

# ACCELERATING DIABETES PREVENTION IN THE COVID-19 ERA

## WEBINAR WRAP-UP REPORT

With the support of Merck KGaA

According to the latest estimates from the [International Diabetes Federation \(IDF\)](#), 463 million adults are living with diabetes<sup>1</sup>, 90% of whom have type 2 diabetes. An additional 374 million adults live with impaired glucose tolerance, which places them at risk of developing type 2 diabetes later in life.

This webinar took place on April 29, 2021, and featured the perspectives from healthcare professionals, institutional representatives and people living with diabetes on the importance of preventing and monitoring impaired glucose tolerance and type 2 diabetes.

<sup>1</sup>International Diabetes Federation. IDF Diabetes Atlas, 9th edn. Brussels, Belgium: 2019. Available at: <https://www.diabetesatlas.org>



Watch the  
webinar



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agenda and the  
speakers' bios



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## Highlights



**Prof Andrew Boulton,**  
IDF President and  
webinar host (UK)

- The diabetes figures and the projections for the coming decades are extremely worrying. At least a billion people are either living with diabetes or at increased risk of developing it.
- COVID-19 has affected people living with diabetes disproportionately. Paradoxically, the disruption caused by COVID-19 has led to a neglect of diabetes.
- Clinical research has swung back to infectious diseases.
- Fear of hospitals has led to poor attendance to appointments. But there have also been improvements such as reduced bureaucracy and an increased use of telemedicine.

- Type 2 diabetes is on the rise among people under 25, most probably due to a combination of genetic/ethnic risk and changes in lifestyle in many countries.

**“We need to increase global awareness of diabetes as a serious life-threatening condition. It is an important message politicians need to hear.”**



**Dr Mark Barone,**  
**IDF Vice-President**  
**and webinar moderator**  
**(Brazil)**

- The pandemic has made it more difficult for many people to exercise safely and access healthy food. This may lead to more diabetes, hypertension and obesity. Reducing the risks in the COVID-19 era is therefore crucial.
- People with diabetes must have access to their treatment and the quality of care required to help prevent severe complications and premature mortality.

**“If we do not reduce the risks and treat obesity, we will not prevent many new cases of type 2 diabetes”**

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**Dr Francesco Branca,**  
**Director [WHO department](#)**  
**[of Nutrition for Health and](#)**  
**[Development](#) (Switzerland)**

- Diabetes is making COVID-19 worse. A high proportion of people with COVID-19 complications have a non-communicable disease.
- Studies focused on children have confirmed that the negative impact of the pandemic on physical activity and food habits.
- 80% of countries have diabetes operational plans, policies or strategies in place. Yet, in the majority, diabetes prevention is ineffective because they do not have plans of sufficient quality or they do not implement their plans successfully.

- Governments and schools have the responsibility and power to promote healthy habits and avoid the over-consumption of certain foods and drinks among children.

**“People with obesity are hospitalised more often, rely on respirators more frequently and are more likely than anybody else to die prematurely. So, clearly, the prevention of obesity is important for the prevention of severe complications of COVID-19”**

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**Dr Justin Echouffo-Tchuegui,**  
**Special Interest Group on IGT,**  
**[John Hopkins](#) (US)**

- The overnight switch to telemedicine caused by COVID-19 has proved effective in overcoming some of the challenges in providing diabetes care, namely poor access to care (geographical limitations, travel and time barriers, low patient/healthcare provider ratio) and economic costs of prevention.
- Digital tools to support diabetes prevention show real promise. Examples would include the delivery of online training via email, web, mobile phone etc., the personal tracking of health data and live coaching. These have all shown that digital health prevention could be cost saving and deliver concrete outcomes.

**“Digital health is the opportunity to scale up the prevention of diabetes and to come up with convenient and flexible programmes that can be delivered efficiently”**

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**Ms Jacqueline Bowman, EU Policy Lead at the [European Association for the Study of Obesity](#); Head of Expert Secretariat at [OPEN/EU](#) (Guyana/Belgium)**

- People with severe obesity were 113% more likely to have a negative prognosis once they were hospitalised with COVID-19.
- The pandemic has forced people to talk about obesity-related complications, highlighting the importance of ending oversimplification (“eat less/move more”) and the stigmatisation of obesity as a life-style choice.
- Education is fundamental, since most policymakers who design and implement policies are neither scientists nor doctors. They need precision and a clear narrative.

**“After 18 months of really pushing, the obesity community has managed to have obesity described as a medical condition [...] and as a chronic relapsing disease, which in turn acts as a gateway to a range of other non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and cancer.”**

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**Mr Travis Frans, [IDF Young Leader in Diabetes](#) living with type 2 diabetes (South Africa)**

- Mr Frans has advocated on social media for years, sharing his story with obesity to help others identify and fight stigma.
- Stigma around obesity is the result of a lack of education and leads to uninformed opinion and offensive commentary (“you are lazy”, “it is your fault”, etc.).
- The keys to success are what Travis calls the four E’s: Equip yourself with evidence-based information. Evolve physically and emotionally. Be Empowered by the positive changes you make. Elevate people around you by inspiring them.

**“Knowledge is power. I had to realise that obesity is a chronic illness. Fighting it cannot be a sprint, it’s a marathon.”**

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**Dr Erum Ghafoor, [IDF Blue Circle Voice](#) member living with type 2 diabetes (Pakistan)**

- Dr Ghafoor was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes at the age of 14. It was a shock for her family and nobody knew what to do. She was severely stigmatised.
- The epidemic of diabetes can only be controlled by targeting the root cause (impaired glucose tolerance) and implementing preventive measures. The essential targets are healthy weight loss, physical activity and stress reduction.

**“I’ve been called many names, like “a burden of society”. I’ve been discriminated against and rejected for higher studies many times just because of diabetes. Then, I came to appreciate that [...] we, the people living with diabetes, are the game changers”.**

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## IDF and diabetes prevention

- Diabetes prevention is a priority for the [International Diabetes Federation](#). We are deeply committed to prevention through our advocacy, education and awareness-raising activities.
- Given the importance of prevention in easing the impact of diabetes on healthcare systems, IDF is planning the addition of a Diabetes Prevention Week to the global diabetes awareness and advocacy calendar.
- IDF strongly supports the WHO Global Diabetes Compact, which will be a key tool to increase awareness of diabetes as a potentially preventable condition.

## Audience statistics and feedback

- 517 attendees followed the webinar live
- Over 450 people watched the webinar recording during the month after it took place
- Attendees rated the webinar with 8.8/10 (N=73\*)
- 100% of attendees reported having improved their knowledge about diabetes prevention thanks to the webinar (N=73)

“It was great to hear from people living with diabetes”

“It was an awesome webinar, the speakers were very clear”

“The webinar should have lasted 90 minutes”

“Please continue doing these webinars, they improve knowledge and practice”

“Consider running webinars in other languages such as Spanish”

- 54.8% of attendees decided to watch the webinar because of the topic (prevention), with an additional 30.1% watching because of the focus on COVID-19 (N=73)
- 92.7% of live attendees (N=41) and 93.7% of those who watched the recording (N=32) said they planned to watch the webinar again
- 95.1% of live attendees (N=41) and 93.7% of those who watched the recording (N=32) said they would share the webinar recording with their networks

\*N= number of respondents

The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) is an umbrella organization of over 230 national diabetes associations in 170 countries and territories. It represents the interests of the growing number of people with diabetes and those at risk. The Federation has been leading the global diabetes community since 1950.

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