

WINNING THE WAR: SINGAPORE FIGHTS TO MEET THE FINANCIAL NEEDS OF DIABETICS

**DIABETES CAN BE
A LIFE-CHANGING
DIAGNOSIS
- WITH LIFE-LONG
COSTS.**

Many of the newly diagnosed diabetics must make tough lifestyle adjustments, from adapting to new diets to enduring daily blood tests. But the most significant changes are often not physical – but financial: Diabetes can place unforeseen and sometimes debilitating strain on personal savings and on family budgets.

Singapore has become a leader in combatting this chronic condition – and in confronting its costs through insurance coverage options. The Ministry of Health has called on Singaporeans to fight a “War on Diabetes,” and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong reinforced this message during the National Day Rally 2017. His call to arms seems appropriate: approximately one in nine Singaporeans has been diagnosed with diabetes since 2014, according to the Ministry of Health (MOH) Singapore, and by 2050 nearly 1 million Singaporeans could be affected.





The challenge extends far beyond Singapore. The number of adults living with diabetes has more than doubled worldwide in the last 15 years, according to the International Diabetes Federation. Approximately 463 million adults (aged 20-79 years) were living with the disease as of 2019, and the federation estimates that by 2045 the population of diabetics could reach 700 million.[1]

Together with Singapore's Institute of Policy Studies, the MOH assembled a Citizens' Jury (CJ) of members of the public to generate community-based recommendations to combat the alarming rise in diabetes cases.[2] MOH also formed a taskforce that includes Diabetes Singapore, a non-profit organization focused on increasing awareness and prevention, as well as expanding access to disease management services.

"The key missions of Diabetes Singapore (DS) include raising awareness about the diabetes condition and its complications, participating in efforts on diabetes prevention, as well as helping diabetes patients with the management of the condition," says George Lee, Executive Director of Diabetes Singapore. The non-profit organization also offers eye and foot screenings and support group activities. DS is working to expand accessibility by deploying mobile clinic vans as well as training health coaches in community settings.

Defining Diabetes

Such aggressive and nationwide efforts underscore the seriousness of the challenge.

Fighting diabetes firstly requires understanding this enemy. The disease robs the body of its ability to use or produce insulin, resulting in excess glucose (sugar) that builds in the blood stream. All diabetics must continually measure and control blood glucose levels, but treatments can vary by type: ·

- **Type 1 Diabetes** occurs when no, or very little, insulin is released into the body. Sugar builds up in the blood instead of being used as energy. While Type 1 diabetes can develop at any age, it often appears in childhood or adolescence. People with Type 1 diabetes need daily injections of insulin to keep their glucose level under control. [3]
- **Type 2 Diabetes** occurs when the body can't properly use the insulin that it produces. About 90% of diabetics suffer from Type 2, and another 352 million people worldwide at risk of developing it are deemed pre-diabetic. The cornerstone of Type 2 diabetes treatment is a healthy lifestyle, which includes exercise, a nutritious diet, and no smoking. However, over time people with Type 2 diabetes will require oral drugs and even insulin to control their blood glucose levels. [4].

[1] <https://www.idf.org/aboutdiabetes/what-is-diabetes/facts-figures.html>

[2] <https://www.moh.gov.sg/wodcj>

[3] <https://idf.org/aboutdiabetes/type-1-diabetes.html>

[4] <https://idf.org/aboutdiabetes/type-2-diabetes.html>

- Gestational Diabetes occurs during pregnancy, and if managed poorly, babies may be born with hyperglycaemia. Women with gestational diabetes need to monitor and manage their blood glucose levels. [5]

Medical and technological advances have reduced mortality and made the disease far more manageable. Still, when uncontrolled, diabetes can lead to blindness, kidney failure, coronary artery disease, cuts that won't heal, or circulatory problems and other deadly and debilitating conditions.

It is a life of constant counting, and it adds up to increasing need for insurance protection for those diagnosed with the condition and their loved ones.

Importance of Insurance

For many diabetics, it is not the inconvenience of the present condition that generates the greatest concern, but fear for the future. There can be no stronger incentive to obtain insurance coverage than the need to protect against the unexpected, and yet a protection gap persists among diabetics even in Singapore, home to a highly regarded MediShield Life/Integrated Shield public health system. Reinsurance Group of America (RGA) conducted focus groups of a broad cross-section of Singapore residents with diabetes. Many shared worries about affording the costs of future health conditions linked to their diabetes and expressed interest in additional coverage to address unexpected medical expenses that could consume their savings.

Yet, while people with diabetes could benefit from additional insurance protection, diabetic applicants have traditionally experienced challenges in obtaining coverage. Focus group participants shared frustrations over a lack of affordability and fears of being declined automatically, as well as concern over overly complex insurance terms and conditions and exclusion language. As one noted, "We are the ones who need insurance, but we don't get covered."

Insurance for Diabetics?

As diabetes increases in prevalence, a number of insurers in Singapore have launched Critical Illness (CI) products designed to offer vital financial support in the event of an unexpected and severe illness for diabetics. With CI, the diabetics receive a lump sum payment if they are diagnosed with a critical illness (e.g. cancer, heart attack, stroke), and these funds could support medical treatment and rehabilitation expenses, or meet any other emergency needs.

A number of insurers in Singapore have developed CI insurance plans for Type 2 diabetics. People with diabetes can do a quick desktop search and find these insurance plans covering them for death, Total and Permanent Disability (TPD), and key CI conditions.



[5] <https://www.idf.org/our-activities/care-prevention/gdm>

The image shows a close-up of a person's hand in a dark blue suit jacket, pointing their index finger at a blue toggle switch. The word "insurance" is written in white lowercase letters to the left of the switch. The background is dark and out of focus.

insurance

Some insurance plans further cover diabetics for complications, such as limb amputation. To manage this chronic condition, an insurer has also recently partnered with a digital therapeutics company to offer customers a free health management program.

A diabetes diagnosis comes with a dose of fear over financial security and uncertainty. And while organizations like DS seek to fight the war on diabetes through greater awareness and prevention, additional insurance coverage is the best means to help those already diagnosed.

RGA

To learn more about RGA's insights to this article, please contact RGA's Asia Regional Marketing team at svc4RegionalMarketin@rgare.com.



For any queries related to diabetes complications screening, please contact Diabetes Singapore at enquiry@diabetes.org.sg.