

Media Release
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**Call for Government to take more responsibility in tackling
type 2 diabetes**

The Government needs to intervene to change the environmental factors that contribute to the type 2 diabetes epidemic, the Public Health Association conference has been told.

Esther Willing, a public health analyst, told the delegates in Dunedin today that her research looked at how district health boards framed type 2 diabetes as an issue in their area and how this influenced what they did in practice to address it. It led her to conclude that at least some of the responsibility for reducing the incidence of the disease lies with the Government.

"All DHBs viewed diabetes through a medical lens. So they focussed on the number of hospital beds needed, cost of treatment, numbers of clinicians involved. Some also framed it as a lifestyle issue and concentrated on primary care and community health initiatives, like physical activity programmes, to prevent or minimise it.

"Some DHBs acknowledged that, in addition, there were wider environmental factors contributing to the prevalence of diabetes. For instance the plethora of fast food outlets in a district heavily affected by type 2 diabetes. But when DHBs framed diabetes in this way, they were unable to address these issues as they lie outside of the health sector."

Ms Willing and her research partner, Dr Tim Tenbenschel from the University of Auckland, found that some DHBs, such as Counties Manukau, had successfully influenced environmental factors, such as persuading the local McDonalds to offer sugar-free drinks.

"But in the end, these are very small changes. While DHBs are able to develop local health policy responses, they cannot create the wider social and environmental changes that are necessary. Strong policy leadership by the government is needed to make the real, and necessary, difference."

For more information contact:
Anton Blank, 021406031
Conference communications