



DIABETES ALLIANCE

Diabetes Alliance

8 Empire Ave, Hout Bay, 7806

Email: info@diabetesadvocacy.org.za

Website: www.diabetesalliance.org.za

NPO Reg. 242-237

Minister of Health

Dr AB Xuma Building, 1112 Voortrekker Rd

Pretoria Townlands 351-JR

Tel: 012 395 8086

Email: minister@health.gov.za

Monday, 07 November 2022

Dear Honourable Minister of Health, Dr Joe Phaahla

Re: An open letter from the Diabetes Alliance ahead of World Diabetes Day on 14 November 2022

I am writing to you on behalf of the [Diabetes Alliance](http://www.diabetesalliance.org.za), a non-profit organisation committed to improving the health and wellness of South Africans living with diabetes.

Education to protect tomorrow

We call on you to **prioritise diabetes education in South Africa** urgently and to improve **access to the best possible diabetes education** for health professionals and South Africans living with diabetes by creating a national diabetes education programme.

Our call is in support of the International Diabetes Federation's global priority for World Diabetes Day in 2022, namely, 'Education to protect tomorrow', which seeks to augment diabetes education to improve outcomes for people living with diabetes.

The diabetes scourge in South Africa

An estimated [4.2 million South Africans live with diabetes](#) – 45.4% of whom are undiagnosed, based on the latest figures from the International Diabetes Federation. According to Statistics SA, diabetes is the number one killer of women, the second cause of death in both men and women. Evidence suggests that diabetes management is suboptimal and characterised by a lack of diabetes education.



DIABETES ALLIANCE

One year since the South African Diabetes Summit

The Diabetes Alliance organised the first [South African Diabetes Summit](#) in 2021. The Honourable Deputy Minister of Health, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, attended this event. **Diabetes education was highlighted as a major need** in the South African diabetes response.

Diabetes education gaps

Currently, the efforts to educate South Africans with diabetes and healthcare professionals are sporadic and not sustainable. There is **a stark absence of well-structured and standardised diabetes education programmes**, and a significant gap in making these programmes widely accessible. To the best of our knowledge, there is still **no policy specific to diabetes education** in South Africa.

Illustrating the impact of poor diabetes education

Most South Africans living with diabetes who attend primary healthcare facilities do not receive an annual foot exam. Apparently, healthcare providers cannot do it and patients are not aware that they need it. **Diabetes education is evidently not a priority**, especially in under-resourced and understaffed health facilities. As a result, **lower limb amputations due to diabetes are common** and cost the fiscus an estimated R68 billion annually.

Empowering South Africans living with diabetes to avoid complications

The dynamic and complex nature of diabetes and its impact on a person's life requires individuals to make frequent and ongoing self-management decisions. The goal of diabetes education and management is to: (1) reduce the personal and economic burden of diabetes, (2) promote quality of life, and (3) improve health outcomes for people with diabetes.

In turn, the diabetes burden on families, communities, health systems and society can be averted. People living with diabetes and their families **need to be empowered and better informed** to avoid diabetes-related complications, be it kidney failures, amputations, blindness, stroke, etc.

Education for healthcare professionals

There is **a pressing need to invest in the training of healthcare professionals** and dedicate sufficient resources to diabetes education and care for South Africans living with diabetes. When diabetes is undetected or inadequately treated, people with diabetes are at high risk of serious and life-threatening complications.



DIABETES ALLIANCE

Investment in diabetes education will help reduce the prevalence of diabetes-related complications, thereby minimising the economic costs associated with treating diabetes complications.

Global and South African diabetes targets

South Africa has committed to achieving the [World Health Organisation's diabetes coverage targets](#). Moreover, South Africa has adopted a **90 – 60 – 50 cascading approach** to improve early detection and treatment of hypertension and diabetes, as outlined in the [National Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, 2022 – 2027](#).

We **welcome these targets**. However, achieving the targets will **be difficult in the absence of quality diabetes education**.

Diabetes Alliance proposal in 2022

Given the challenges highlighted above, the Diabetes Alliance proposes the following solutions:

1. The introduction of a **standardised and coordinated diabetes education programme** for both South Africans living with diabetes and healthcare providers.
2. The **recognition and formalisation of the role of diabetes educators**.

In few days, South Africa will commemorate World AIDS Day, marking an opportunity for the country to celebrate the achievements of the South African HIV programme. Meanwhile, South Africans living with diabetes **have very little to celebrate**.

On behalf of the diabetes community in South Africa, I urge you to **dedicate sufficient resources to create a national diabetes education programme in South Africa**.

The diabetes community counts on your leadership and support.

Sincerely,

Dr Patrick Ngassa Piotie
Chairperson of the Diabetes Alliance