



**DIABETES  
ALLIANCE**

# **2023 Diabetes Summit**

Diabetes Targets, Translating  
Policy into Reality

## **Executive Summary**

May 2024



**DIABETES ALLIANCE**  
Fighting diabetes together

In collaboration with:  
University of Pretoria Diabetes Research Centre,  
SA Diabetes Advocacy and  
the support from the National Department of Health.



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Lefapha la Disaense tša Maphelo



**health**  
Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **Executive Summary compiled by:**

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## Diabetes is an escalating public health crisis in South Africa.

According to the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), South Africa has the **highest prevalence of diabetes in Africa**, with an estimated **4.3 million people** living with the condition. Shockingly, **one in nine adults** in the country live with diabetes, with many cases remaining **undiagnosed**.

Compounding this crisis is the stark reality that diabetes stands as the **leading cause of death among women**. This harrowing statistic underscores the urgent need for comprehensive diabetes awareness and intervention strategies.

Obesity emerges as a significant driver of the diabetes epidemic in South Africa. Alarming, the nation ranks among the **top 10 countries globally in adult obesity rates**. Approximately 69% of South African women are classified as overweight or obese, while childhood obesity rates are on the rise.

Untreated diabetes **undermines overall outcomes for other major conditions** and groups, namely, tuberculosis, HIV, maternal and neonatal health, cardiovascular disease, and chronic kidney disease.

“Diabetes can be prevented, treated, and managed.  
No one should be left behind.”

*Dr. Patrick Ngassa Piotie, Chairperson of the South African Diabetes Alliance,  
and Co-Founder of the University of Pretoria Diabetes Research Centre.*

# Executive Summary

In collaboration with the University of Pretoria Diabetes Research Centre, SA Diabetes Advocacy and People Living with Diabetes, the Diabetes Alliance staged the second Diabetes Summit in November 2023. Themed 'South African Diabetes Targets – Translating Policy into Reality', the Summit focused on exploring challenges and solutions to achieving the 90-60-50 cascade for diabetes and hypertension, as outlined in the National Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) (2022-2027) (NSP).

Designed to be inclusive and reflective of diverse experiences and expertise, the Summit featured speakers from 21 local and international organisations involved in diabetes prevention and care. These included people living with diabetes, diabetes advocates, healthcare professionals, health authorities, government officials, policymakers, academics, public health specialists, representatives of private medical schemes and pharmaceutical companies, and non-profit organisations (NPOs).

The event was structured around seven key themes, aligned with the objectives of the NSP and the World Health Organization Global Diabetes Compact, as illustrated in Table 1 below. Panel discussions centred on each theme, featuring experts who explored challenges and opportunities, all united in their commitment to overcoming obstacles and strengthening the diabetes response in South Africa.



Themes	NSP Goal	Objectives
Awareness and prevention	NSP Goal 1	To prioritise prevention and control of NCDs+
Education	NSP Goal 2	To promote and enable health and wellness across the life course.
Management and access to care	NSP Goal 3	To ensure that people living with NCDs+ . receive integrated, people-centred health services to prevent and control NCDs+ .
Surveillance	NSP Goal 5	To monitor strategic trends and determinants of NCDs+ to evaluate progress in their prevention and control.
Innovation and research	NSP Goal 4	To promote and support national capacity for high-quality research and development for the prevention and control of NCDs+ .
Investing in diabetes prevention and control	NSP Goal 1	To prioritise prevention and control of NCDs+ .

Table 1: Diabetes Summit themes aligned to the NSP goals

During the Summit, several critical challenges were identified that impede optimal diabetes prevention and care in South Africa:

- 1. Low awareness levels:** There exists a pervasive lack of awareness about diabetes and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) across the healthcare system and within communities.
- 2. Lack of structured education for healthcare workers:** The absence of an evidence-based diabetes education programme for health workers at all levels of care poses a significant obstacle.
- 3. Lack of recognition of Diabetes Nurse Educators:** Despite their pivotal role, professional nurses trained as Diabetes Nurse Educators remain unrecognized and inadequately integrated into the healthcare system. These nurses possess the potential to play a crucial role in empowering people living with diabetes to effectively manage their condition.
- 4. Gaps in the cascades of care:** Significant gaps persist within the diabetes care cascades, detrimentally impacting the quality of care provided.
- 5. Underutilization of community healthcare workers (CHWs):** The potential of CHWs remains largely untapped. They should be actively involved in community screening for diabetes and hypertension, as well as in recognizing diabetes symptoms and complications, and facilitating timely referrals for appropriate care.
- 6. Absence of dedicated diabetes surveillance systems:** South Africa lacks a dedicated diabetes surveillance system, resulting in an underestimation of the true extent of the diabetes burden.

The Diabetes Alliance acknowledges the challenges posed by constrained resources within the National Department of Health (NDOH) and the provincial departments of health, necessitating the need to “do more with less.” However, proactive investment in diabetes prevention and care today can help alleviate the immense strain that diabetes and its complications will place on the healthcare system in the future. Investments are crucial across various areas, including diabetes education, prevention, awareness, introduction of new pharmaceuticals, monitoring equipment, and innovative diabetes technologies.

To this end, the 2023 Diabetes Summit has crafted a list of recommendations. The Diabetes Alliance is fully committed to working in collaboration with the South African government including the Department of Health and all stakeholders to plan and execute these recommendations effectively. Establishing a national coordinating body for NCDs is essential to ensure effective oversight and implementation of the NSP.

The following is a summary of the key recommendations made by the speakers across the main themes of awareness and prevention, education, management and access to care, surveillance, and research and innovation.

Themes	Summary of key recommendations
<b>Awareness and prevention:</b>	<b>1. Implement WHO Best Buys</b> –By implementing the Who Best Buys such as the promotion of healthy diets and physical activity, South Africa can significantly improve public health outcomes and mitigate the socioeconomic impact of NCDs.
	<b>2. Leverage revenue generated from the Health Promotion Levy</b> –The revenue generated from the Health Promotion Levy can be directed towards combating diabetes by funding the implementation of the National Strategic Plan.
<b>Education:</b>	<b>3. Develop an evidence-based structured diabetes education programme</b> – Resources should be allocated to develop a comprehensive diabetes education programme for individuals living with diabetes.
	<b>4. Build a skilled health workforce for diabetes care</b> - A comprehensive training programme should be developed to enhance the skills and knowledge of healthcare workers, including doctors, nurses, clinical associates, community health workers (CHWs), and others, in diabetes management and care.



Themes	Summary of key recommendations
<b>Management and access to care:</b>	<p><b>5. Enhance task shifting and care coordination</b> – By harnessing the expertise of both CHWs and Clinical Associates, South Africa can enhance its diabetes care infrastructure, expand access to quality care, and ultimately improve health outcomes.</p> <p><b>6. Introduce new diabetes drugs and devices in the public health sector</b> – Introducing new therapeutic options and devices into the public sector to allow healthcare professionals customize treatment plans according to each patient’s needs is essential for improving diabetes outcomes and addressing diabetes inequities.</p>
<b>Surveillance:</b>	<p><b>7. Develop a diabetes surveillance system including a national diabetes registry</b> - By seamlessly integrating with existing health information systems, an integrated, digitized diabetes surveillance system can provide real-time data on diabetes prevalence, risk factors, and outcomes, enabling targeted interventions and research initiatives.</p> <p><b>8. Implement WHO-recommended surveillance tools such as the Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) and the WHO STEPwise approach</b> – By adopting these tools, South Africa can enhance its capacity for diabetes surveillance and data collection, enabling more accurate monitoring of diabetes prevalence, risk factors, and outcomes.</p>
<b>Research and innovation:</b>	<p><b>9. Formulate a tailored national diabetes research agenda</b> – Developing a context-specific national research agenda for diabetes by prioritising research areas and allocating resources to support related activities can generate evidence-based information to guide policy development.</p>
<b>Investing in diabetes:</b>	<p><b>10. Explore alternative funding sources such as the Health Promotion Levy and the Global Fund</b> – In a context of constrained resources, it becomes imperative to explore new funding sources or innovative approaches to maximize the impact of available resources.</p>





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