

## DIABETES IN THE U.S. LATINO POPULATION

### Common Types of Diabetes

#### Type 1:

Approximately 5% to 10% of diagnosed cases. Type 1 develops when the body's immune system destroys pancreatic beta cells, the only cells in the body that make insulin, the hormone that regulates blood glucose. Risk factors for type 1 diabetes include autoimmune, genetic, and environmental factors.<sup>1</sup>

#### Type 2:

Approximately 90% to 95% of diagnosed cases. Type 2 begins as insulin resistance, a disorder in which cells do not use insulin properly. The pancreas gradually loses its ability to produce insulin, resulting in type 2 diabetes. Type 2 is associated with older age, obesity, a family history of diabetes, physical inactivity, and race/ethnicity.<sup>1</sup>

#### Gestational:

Gestational diabetes, which usually resolves after pregnancy, is a form of glucose intolerance that is diagnosed in about 4% of women during pregnancy—in particular among obese women and women with a family history of diabetes. During pregnancy, gestational diabetes requires treatment to normalize maternal blood glucose levels to avoid complications to the infant.<sup>1</sup>

### Diabetes Risk Factors

- ▶ A family history of diabetes.
- ▶ A history of gestational diabetes or a history of delivering a baby weighing more than 9 pounds.
- ▶ Being over 40.
- ▶ Being overweight or obese\*: Especially high percentages of Latino adults are overweight (Figure 1). High percentages of self-identified Mexicans or Mexican Americans in particular are overweight: more than 47% of men and 35% of women.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ Inactive lifestyle: A reported one-fifth of Latino adults lead a sedentary lifestyle.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Limited access to health care: Among adults with diabetes, Latinos in California are nearly four times more likely to have no usual source of health care than whites (12.3% vs. 3.4%).<sup>4</sup>

### Prevalence of Diabetes

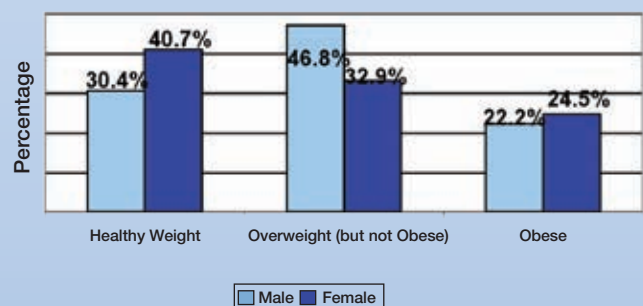
#### United States

- ▶ As of 2002, 2 million Latinos over age 20 in the United States had been diagnosed with diabetes. Approximately 24% of the Mexican-origin community in the United States ages 45-74 have diabetes.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ In the United States, Latinos are 1.5 times more likely to have diabetes than non-Latino whites of similar age.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Mexican Americans are over 2 times more likely to have diabetes than non-Latino whites of similar ages.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ In the United States, for every two diagnosed cases of diabetes, another undiagnosed case exists.<sup>2</sup>

#### California

- ▶ Among adults 65 and over, 24% of Latinos are diagnosed with diabetes, a rate at least double that of non-Latino whites (12%).<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ In 2001, over 339,000 Latino adults ages 18 and over reported that they had diabetes.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ Over one-third (34%) of Latinos with diabetes are not taking medication for the condition, compared to approximately one-fifth (18%-22%) of other racial and ethnic populations.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Regular physical activity is essential to reducing the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. In California, Latino adolescents report the highest rates of not engaging in physical activity compared with their peers.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1. Percent Distributions of Body Weight Status\* for Latino Adults, 1999-2001



Source: National Center for Health Statistics, 2004<sup>5</sup>

## Complications

- ▶ **Heart failure:** Almost two-thirds (65%) of people who die of heart disease have diabetes, making it the leading cause of death among diabetics. Diabetics have 2 to 4 times the chance of developing heart disease than non-diabetics.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ **Amputation:** Diabetes is the leading cause of nontraumatic amputation of the lower limbs.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ **Kidney failure:** Diabetes is the leading cause of end-stage renal disease, accounting for 43% of new cases. Among people with diabetes, Mexican Americans are 4.5 to 6.6 times more likely to suffer from end-stage renal disease.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ **Blindness:** Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in the United States. *Diabetic retinopathy*, a term for diabetes-caused abnormalities of retinal small blood vessels that can lead to blindness, has a 32% to 40% prevalence among Mexican Americans.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ **Others:** Other complications include stroke, high blood pressure, nervous system disease, dental disease, pregnancy complications, biochemical imbalances, and susceptibility to other illnesses such as pneumonia and influenza.<sup>1</sup>

## Latina Women and Diabetes

- ▶ 29% of Mexican or Mexican-American females ages 18 and over are obese, a major risk factor for diabetes.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ Mexican-American women have higher rates of gestational diabetes than non-Latina white women.<sup>7</sup>

## Latino Youth and Diabetes

- ▶ Recent studies report an increase in type 2 diabetes among Mexican Americans younger than 18, particularly among those who are overweight.<sup>8</sup>

## Policy Opportunities

The lack of health care access and education on prevention exacerbates the diabetes problem among the Latino community. Given the elevated risks associated with obesity, policymakers, community leaders, and health-care professionals in conjunction with patients should aim to prevent obesity and promote active and healthy lifestyles. Equally important is the need to ensure access to available, consistent, and culturally competent preventive health care for Latinos. As the U.S. Latino population continues to grow, it is important to provide preventive care and, when necessary, interventions for adults and children to limit the diabetes epidemic and reduce the number affected.

The information presented in this fact sheet was assembled by Xóchitl Castañeda, California-Mexico Health Initiative Director, with the support of the CMHI staff.

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## References

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\*Measured using Body Mass Index, a weight:height ratio. BMI is measured using the formula kilograms/meters squared. *Underweight* is defined as a BMI of less than 18.5; *healthy weight*, 18.5 or higher but less than 25; *overweight*, 25 or higher but less than 30; and *obese*, 30 or higher.<sup>5</sup>

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