Overview

Diabetes is a tremendously costly illness, both in terms of health outcomes and of our nation's escalating health care costs. In 2015, 30.1 million people or 1 in 10 people in the U.S. had diabetes; an additional 84.1 million people were estimated to have prediabetes. The prevalence of diabetes is even more staggering among those eligible for Medicare. In 2015, over one-quarter of U.S. residents 65 and older (9.9 million) had diabetes and nearly half 65 and older (23.1 million) had prediabetes.

In other words, seven out of 10 people eligible for Medicare are affected by diabetes or prediabetes. For half of these individuals, however, diabetes could be prevented if they had access to a diet and exercise lifestyle intervention.

The Costs of Diabetes

One in four health care dollars is spent treating people with diabetes. The total cost of prediabetes and diabetes to our health care system in 2017 was estimated to be $327 billion, including $237 billion in direct medical expenditures and $90 billion in reduced national productivity. Combined, this amounts to an economic burden exceeding $1,000 for each American in 2017. The average yearly health care costs for a person with diabetes is $16,750 with $9,600 due to diabetes alone.

Role of Medical Nutrition Therapy to Prevent Diabetes

Medical nutrition therapy is a nutritional diagnostic, therapy and counseling service for disease management. When provided by a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, MNT includes: 1) lifestyle, knowledge and skills assessment, 2) negotiation of individualized nutrition goals, 3) nutrition intervention and 4) evaluation of clinical and behavioral outcomes. To ensure an individualized therapeutic plan, MNT is conducted through one-on-one sessions between an RDN and a client or patient. MNT provided by an RDN is similar to the one-on-one counseling provided during national trials that were found to prevent diabetes; people receiving MNT have shown successful weight loss and improved prediabetes insulin markers.

MNT is a part of successful diet and exercise lifestyle modification. Research shows MNT provided by a registered dietitian nutritionist is an effective, evidence-based practice that can result in weight loss, obesity prevention and improved prediabetes insulin markers, which are the same essential outcomes of other diabetes prevention programs.  

### Cost-Effectiveness of Diabetes Prevention

Diet and exercise lifestyle modification programs have consistently been shown to be cost-effective and even cost-saving methods for preventing and treating diabetes in participants, meaning that compared to other treatment options, such as medication, diet and exercise lifestyle modification programs gives the payer (Medicare) the best return on investment.

**Bottom line:** Research shows diet and exercise lifestyle interventions are cost-effective or even cost-saving treatments for people with prediabetes.

### Benefits of the Preventing Diabetes in Medicare Act (H.R. 3124/S. 1299)

The Preventing Diabetes in Medicare Act will help to prevent cases of diabetes in the Medicare population by allowing medical nutrition therapy to be provided by a registered dietitian nutritionist for individuals with prediabetes or with risk factors for diabetes. Currently, Medicare covers screening for Type 2 diabetes and medical nutrition therapy for diabetes, but not for prediabetes.

H.R. 3124/S.1299 is a bipartisan bill that was introduced in the 115th Congress by Reps. Diana DeGette (Colo.) and Lynn Jenkins (Kan.) and Sens. Shelley Moore Capito (W.Va.) and Gary Peters (Mich.).

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