

United States' Diabetes Crisis among Seniors: Today and Future Trends

Diabetes is a serious and rapidly growing problem among America's seniors. It is estimated that 27% of people 65 and older have diabetes and an additional 50% have pre-diabetes.⁶ A recently released study² and the 2011 National Diabetes Fact Sheet⁶ from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predict a dramatic increase in diabetes between 2010 and 2050. Using this new information from the CDC, the Institute for Alternative Futures diabetes model estimates that the number of Seniors living with diabetes (diagnosed and undiagnosed) in America will increase 59% by 2025 from 10,821,600 to 17,191,000.¹ The resulting medical and societal cost of diabetes will be \$168 billion – a 59% increase from 2010.¹

In 2010, there were 40,229,000 people in the United States who were age 65 and older²⁴ and 10,821,600 of them had diabetes.¹ Twenty-seven percent of these seniors were undiagnosed¹ and possibly beginning to suffer from the common complications of diabetes, including eye, kidney, lower extremity, and heart damage.³ In 2010, there were 1,607,800 seniors in the United States who had visual impairment. Another 20,250 developed kidney failure, and 27,180 seniors had a leg amputation as a result of their diabetes.¹ Furthermore, people 65 and older with diabetes can die 4-11 years prematurely, depending upon sex and ethnicity.⁷ The overall cost of diabetes among seniors in the United States, including medical expenses and lost productivity, was about \$105.7 billion in 2010.¹

Another 20,115,000 seniors in the United States had pre-diabetes,¹ a condition in which the blood sugar level is higher than normal but not yet in the range for diabetes.⁴ Many scientific studies have shown that relatively simple life-style changes, such as modest weight loss and increases in regular physical activity, can often prevent pre-diabetes from progressing to diabetes or significantly delay its onset by as much as 71%.¹⁴

Pre-Diabetes and Diabetes Trends¹ among Seniors in the United States

U.S. Seniors Diabetes Data and Forecasts	2010	2025
Population	40,229,000	63,907,000
Pre-diabetes	20,115,000	31,954,000
Diagnosed diabetes	7,901,000	12,551,300
Undiagnosed diabetes	2,920,600	4,639,700
Total with diabetes (diagnosed and undiagnosed)	10,821,600	17,191,000
Total with pre-diabetes or undiagnosed diabetes	23,035,600	36,593,700
Complications:		
Visual impairment	1,607,800	2,435,000
Renal failure	20,250	26,700
Leg amputations	27,180	31,400
Annual deaths attributable to diabetes	109,520	135,900
Total annual cost (2010 dollars)	\$105.7 B	\$168.0 B
Annual medical costs	\$74.3 B	\$118.1 B
Annual nonmedical costs	\$31.4 B	\$49.9 B

Medicare now covers the cost of annual testing for those at risk for diabetes.¹¹ Over half of Medicare beneficiaries have undiagnosed diabetes or pre-diabetes (23,035,600 in 2010 in United States¹). It is therefore important for health care professionals to make sure that their patients aged 65 and older get tested annually and receive effective early intervention if their blood sugar levels are abnormal.¹¹

We now understand more about delaying or even preventing the onset of diabetes as well as how to effectively treat it, both of which can result in a dramatic reduction in complications and premature death.^{12,13,14} Reducing the future burden of diabetes in the United States depends upon the promotion of targeted screening for asymptomatic adults to identify those with pre-diabetes and undiagnosed diabetes, improved access to quality medical care, and increased patient compliance with therapy.^{14,15,16} However, halting the “twin epidemics” of diabetes and obesity will also require fundamental change in all segments of society, including greater access to opportunities for physical activity in our schools, workplaces, and communities and a significant shift in the American diet away from sugar, salt, refined carbohydrates, and saturated fats and toward more fruits and vegetables.¹⁵ In short, we all play an important role in conquering diabetes.

These forecasts are based on available national diabetes data, including population projections extrapolated to the state, and the CDC’s 2011 National Diabetes Fact Sheet and latest diabetes prevalence projections to 2050. They assume a steady, but conservative, reduction in the number of people with complications due to better awareness of the risks of diabetes, earlier screening and intervention, and more effective therapies.

For endnote references and details on the Institute for Alternative Futures Diabetes 2025 Forecasting Model Methodology, visit www.altfutures.org/diabetes2025.

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