

Review Article

World Diabetes Day – a global health day with history, relevance and impact

¹Chinenye S, ²Chinenye MaryJoe C, ³Akhidue K, ⁴Fasanmade Femi, ⁵Bozimo Gesiye, ⁶Nweke Regina, ⁷Opata R.N., ⁸Nnama A.I.

1, 3, 6 & 8: Department of Internal Medicine, University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

2. Department of Internal Medicine, Rivers State University Teaching Hospital, Port Harcourt

4. Department of Internal Medicine, Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), Lagos, Nigeria.

5. Department of Internal Medicine, Federal Medical Centre, Yenagoa, Nigeria.

7. Department of Internal Medicine, Federal Teaching Hospital, Owerri. Nigeria.

Correspondence author: sunnychinenye@gmail.com

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Background

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), including diabetes, are among the leading health challenges of our time. Diabetes mellitus (DM), commonly known as diabetes, is one of the most prevalent NCDs, with 589 million adults living with DM as at 2024 (1). The prevalence is rising more rapidly in low- and middle-income countries than in high-income countries, with more than 90% of adults with diabetes living with type II DM (3).

Africa is projected to experience the highest percentage increase (142%) from 2024 (24.6million) to 2050 (59.5million) (1).

It is estimated that around half of all people living with diabetes are undiagnosed (2). About one in six live births is affected by diabetes during pregnancy (3). Diabetes in pregnancy can be pre-existing (type 1 or type 2, also referred to as pre-gestational diabetes) or hyperglycaemia can be first detected during pregnancy, which is classified as either diabetes in pregnancy (DIP) or gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) (4).

Diabetes is the commonest endocrine-metabolic disorder in Nigeria similar to the experience in other parts of the world. In Nigeria, diabetes affects the most economically productive age group which translates into reduced productivity with attendant social and financial consequences (5). The prevalence and burden have been on the increase in Nigeria with recent studies giving national average of 7.0% and highest prevalence in the south-south geopolitical zone of 9.8% (6 & 7).

Objectives of the Review

This is a narrative review aimed at highlighting the global unity to fight the diabetes epidemic: The objectives are:

1. Raise awareness to inform the global community about the current magnitude of diabetes and how it affects health worldwide.

2. Promote early detection of diabetes through screening so that prediabetes and overt diabetes can be diagnosed early.
3. Advocate for diabetes care & education to achieve fair access to treatment, medicines and self-management tools.
4. Support healthier lifestyles through spotlight on prevention using diet, physical activity and weight management, especially for type 2 diabetes.
5. Mobilize action by involving governments, civil society organizations, communities and individuals to work together and create supportive policies.
6. Summarize the evidence regarding the effect of diabetes mellitus at the workplace.

Study Methodology

Data were pooled from English language publications spanning from 1991 to 2025, which includes the following sources:

1. IDF Diabetes Atlas, the latest being the 11th IDF Diabetes Atlas published in 2025: this is the biennial report that gives global, regional & country-level numbers on prevalence, mortality, health spending and future projections. It pulls together peer-reviewed studies, national surveys, WHO's Global Health Observatory and other official statistics.
2. World Health Organization (WHO) databases: WHO's Global Health Observatory, regional report (e.g., WHO Africa) and the Global Diabetes Compact framework provide official figures, policy guidance and trend analyses that inform world diabetes day campaign messaging and advocacy.
3. National health surveys & registries: most countries (this is lacking in most African countries) run household or clinic-based surveys (e.g., Demographic Health Surveys, national diabetes registries) whose raw data feed into the IDF Atlas and WHO reports, helping local programs tailor content to their populations.
4. Peer-reviewed literature & multi-country studies: research articles, systematic reviews and meta-analyses on incidence, prevalence, complications and risk factors were constantly mined to seek updates on world diabetes day campaign themes, focus and slogans.
5. Partnership data sharing: collaborations with organizations like the UN, World Bank, and regional bodies (e.g., Africa CDC) and economic, demographic and health-system data that support advocacy for resources and policy change.
6. Campaign-specific surveys & stakeholder feedback: local organizers (e.g., various Diabetes Association chapters) often conduct rapid polls, community focus groups and social-listening exercises to gauge awareness levels and adjust activities in real time.

Together, these sources create a robust evidence base that power the awareness, prevention and care messages rolled out each World Diabetes Day.

Data Extraction: Appraisal of publications and other studies, their quality and extraction of relevant data.

Data Synthesis: Publications and other studies meeting the objectives of the review were identified, findings noted and discussed.

Results and Discussion:

- a) **Historical overview:** In 1991 the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) launched World Diabetes Day, picking “14 November” deliberately—the birthday of Prof. Sir Frederick Banting (November 14, 1891—February 21, 1941), co-discoverer of insulin in 1921. The goal was to turn diabetes from a hidden problem into a visible, global priority (5). Banting’s birthday became the anchor, symbolising the life-saving breakthrough that turned diabetes from a fatal diagnosis into a manageable condition. First years focused on basic awareness; educating people that diabetes isn’t just “sugar” but a serious chronic disease. Participation expanded quickly, with member associations in dozens of countries running local screenings, talks, and community events.
- b) **United Nations Recognition:** In 2006, the United Nations adopted Resolution 61/225, making World Diabetes Day an ‘official UN health day.’ This gave the campaign diplomatic weight, encouraging governments worldwide to act (9).
- c) **The ‘Blue Circle Symbol’:** In 2007, the blue circle was introduced and represents unity and the global fight against diabetes.
- d) **World Diabetes Day campaign Evolution:** themes and focus year-by-year (3, 10 & 11): These are captured in Table 1:

Table 1: Timelines of Diabetic Care and Education

PERIOD	THEME	Core focus & Highlights
1991	Diabetes care and Education	General awareness
1992	Diabetes and Society	Putting diabetes on the global map
1993	Diabetes and Environment	Basic education about diabetes, the environment, early detection and prevention. Investigating the environmental factors related to diabetes.
1994	Diabetes and the new Technologies	Role of emerging technologies in managing diabetes---innovations in monitoring, treatment and care.
1995	Diabetes and Poverty	Addressing the relationship between poverty and diabetes. Highlighting the challenges faced by disadvantaged and vulnerable populations in managing diabetes.
1996	Diabetes and Human Rights	Advocate for fair treatment and equal access to necessary care and resources for people living with diabetes.
1997	Diabetes and the disadvantaged & vulnerable	Highlight the specific challenges faced by disadvantaged and vulnerable populations in

		managing diabetes and accessing appropriate care.
1998	Diabetes and Lifestyle	Promote healthy lifestyles in order to prevent and manage diabetes. Emphasis was on importance of a healthy diet, regular physical activity and maintaining a normal weight to control and avoid the onset of type 2 diabetes.
1999	Diabetes and the Young	The main focus was on raising global awareness about the increasing prevalence and complexity of diabetes, particularly its impact on younger populations.
2000	Diabetes and Cardiovascular disease	Raising awareness of diabetes as a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease.
2001	Diabetes: a Problem for all ages in all cultures	Diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Take it to heart.
2002	Your right to a Healthy future	Every individual has a right to a healthy future, free from the burden and complications of diabetes. Proactive measures, including prevention, early diagnosis and access to care are fundamental rights that help secure a healthy future.
2003	Diabetes care for everyone	The primary focus was on advocating for universal access to essential diabetes care.
2004	Diabetes: A Global threat	The primary focus was on recognizing diabetes as a significant growing global health issue & raising awareness about its scale and consequences.
2005	Diabetes and Foot care	The primary focus was to raise global awareness about the serious and costly complications related to the diabetic foot.
2006	Diabetes in the disadvantaged and the vulnerable	Equity, reaching underserved groups, reducing health care gaps
2007	Diabetes in children and adolescents	Youth-centric prevention, early management, school-based support.
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2009	Diabetes Education and prevention	Knowledge sharing, lifestyle change programs, training health workers
2010	Let's take control of diabetes Now	Let's keep diabetes in focus. Sustaining public attention,

		reinforcing on-going care needs.
2011	Act on diabetes Now	Urgent action for future health, policy advocacy.
2012	Protect our future	Safeguarding younger generations, community-level interventions.
2013	Protect our future	Diabetes education and prevention. Scaling education, empowering families, early risk identification.
2014	Go Blue for Breakfast	Community participation, symbolic blue meals, early morning screenings.
2015	Healthy eating	Nutrition education, promoting balanced diets, combating obesity.
2016	Eyes on Diabetes	Eye health screening, preventing vision loss, awareness of complications.
2017	Women and diabetes—our right to a healthy future	Gender-specific risks, maternal health, empowerment of women.
2018--2019	The family and diabetes—Diabetes concerns every family	Diabetes in the house hold, inter-generational support, family-based lifestyle changes.
2020	The Nurse and Diabetes	Celebrating nursing roles, improving care continuity, training frontline staff.
2021-2023	Access to Diabetes Care	Ensuring medicines, technologies and services reach everyone, bridging gaps.
2022	Access to Diabetes Care	Ensuring medicines, technologies and services reach everyone, bridging gaps
2023	Access to Diabetes Care	Ensuring medicines, technologies and services reach everyone, bridging gaps
2024	Diabetes and Wellbeing	Holistic health—physical, mental and social well-being.
2025	Diabetes and wellbeing	Diabetes and the workplace. Know more and do more for diabetes at work.

World Diabetes Day (WDD) 2025

- a) **The theme of WDD 2025 is “Diabetes and Well-being” with the focus “Diabetes at the workplace”.**

Work participation is beneficial for health. Diabetes mellitus is highly prevalent among adults, and although it poses a substantial healthcare cost burden, the true burden might be greater than is currently appreciated through effects on work participation (8). The dimensions of wellness include physical, mental, occupational, social, financial, emotional, environmental, intellectual and spiritual.

b) Diabetes and well-being at work

Millions of people with diabetes face daily challenges managing their condition in the workplace, including stigma, discrimination and exclusion (3). This has a negative impact on their well-being. People living with diabetes can face a lot of unfair treatment at work because there are misconceptions about their capabilities. Negative workplace treatment affects 40% of employees living with diabetes and a global survey by International Diabetes Federation (IDF) revealed that 1 in 3 employees with diabetes has considered leaving their job due to concerns about how they are being treated at work (3).

Globally, 7 in 10 (412 million) adults living with diabetes are of working age (1) and 3 in 4 people living with diabetes surveyed have experienced anxiety, depression or another mental health condition because of their diabetes (3). For millions of employees, diabetes is a daily reality but, in the workplace, it can often become a source of stress, stigma and fear. Many people with diabetes struggle to balance their health with work expectations, while lack of support in the workplace can have a negative impact on care, wellbeing and career progression.

From IDF Facts sheets (3), challenges faced by people living with diabetes at work include:

- Harassment and bullying
- Denied breaks (snacks, rest, bathroom)
- Denied time off to attend appointments
- Missing out on development and training opportunities
- Discomfort in managing diabetes at work
- Lack of workplace policy to support people with diabetes

c) Know more and do more for diabetes at work

From setting up workplace policies, to listening and offering support without judgement, there are many ways to make the workplace a friendlier place for people with diabetes. The following are some of the ways recommended by IDF (3) to do more for diabetes at work:

- Provide a safe and private space for diabetes management and adequate storage for supplies
- Provide access to food, water, toilet facilities and breaks for people to attend to medical needs.
- Have a trained first aider and the necessary supplies to treat a diabetes-related emergency.
- Foster an inclusive environment, free from fear and diabetes-related stigma.
- Offer flexible working arrangements (e.g., part-time or remote work).
- Offer mental well-being support to employees
- Make healthy foods and snacks available in the workplace.
- Encourage physical activity through programmes and incentives.
- Make information about diabetes available in the workplace.
- Organise diabetes screenings

IDF World Diabetes Day Presidential message

The current IDF President (Prof. Peter Schwarz) released a presidential message on 14th November, 2025 with the following content (3):

- “It is indefensible that people living with diabetes are facing stigma, isolation and discrimination in the workplace

- No one should have to hide their diabetes out of fear of being treated differently or denied opportunities.
- Living with diabetes requires ongoing management and workplaces must recognize the physical and mental toll it can take.
- Simple changes, like flexible schedules and private spaces to check glucose levels or administer insulin or other medications, can make a world of difference.
- Together, let us create inclusive, supportive and healthy workplaces that are free of diabetes-related stigma and discrimination.”

Conclusion

Essentially, World Diabetes Day's relevance lies in the continuous global focus on an urgent health crisis like diabetes mellitus while its impact is the resulting collective action, improved access to care, and better health outcomes for millions of people worldwide, living with diabetes.

This review has given details of previous and current key themes, highlighting the necessity of lifestyle modifications (diet and exercise), early detection through screening, and the vital role of education in empowering individuals to manage their condition effectively.

The collective evidence suggests that while WDD programs succeed in generating short-term public engagement and promoting healthy behaviours, their impact on long-term clinical outcomes and systemic policy changes are scanty in the current global literature.

A persistent challenge observed globally is the significant disparity in access to affordable care, essential medicines (like insulin), and support systems across different regions and socioeconomic groups, a gap that often leads to preventable complications.

Future WDD initiatives should build upon these awareness campaigns by adopting more integrated and multifactorial approaches that address both clinical and psychosocial aspects of diabetes care, including mental health support and tackling stigma in workplaces and communities.

To maximize impact, future WDD programs should also focus on:

- Strengthening primary healthcare systems to ensure equitable access to basic diagnostics and essential medicines for all.
- Integrating mental health professionals into diabetes care teams to address the high rates of anxiety and burnout among patients.
- Developing standardized, long-term intervention methods with robust evaluation frameworks to measure sustainable improvements in patient outcomes beyond the immediate campaign period.
- By breaking down existing barriers and bridging gaps in care and knowledge, future World Diabetes Day programs can more effectively contribute to a world where every person living with diabetes can achieve a healthy, dignified, and fulfilling life.

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