

## **The Diabetes-Heart Disease Link** *Surveying Attitudes, Knowledge and Risk*

### **Survey Results At a Glance**

**Finding:** More than two thirds (68 percent) of people with diabetes surveyed do not consider cardiovascular disease, such as heart attacks and stroke, to be a serious complication of diabetes.

**Fact:** At least two thirds of all deaths in people with diabetes are caused by cardiovascular disease. Heart attacks occur at an earlier age in people with diabetes and often result in premature death.

**Finding:** According to the survey, awareness of the increased cardiovascular disease risk is lower among older adults and Hispanics, with three-quarters (75 percent) unaware that cardiovascular disease is a serious health problem caused by diabetes.

**Fact:** Older adults and Hispanics have high rates of diabetes and its complications. Educational efforts about the diabetes-cardiovascular disease link must target these communities.

**Finding:** People with diabetes surveyed are more likely to be aware of serious diabetes complications causing disability such as blindness (65 percent) or amputation (36 percent) rather than complications that may result in premature death such as heart disease (17 percent), heart attack (14 percent) or stroke (5 percent).

**Fact:** While it is crucial that people with diabetes know about all potential complications of their disease and how to reduce them, efforts are needed to increase awareness of the link between diabetes and life-threatening cardiovascular disease. People with diabetes are more likely to die from a heart attack and are more likely to have multiple heart attacks or strokes than those without diabetes.

**Finding: Sixty percent of people with diabetes surveyed do not feel at risk for either high blood pressure or cholesterol problems.**

**Fact:** Diabetes is most often accompanied by other cardiovascular risk factors such as high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol. In fact, up to 60% of adults with diabetes have high blood pressure and nearly all have one or more cholesterol problems, such as increased triglycerides, low HDL (“good”) cholesterol, or elevated LDL (“bad”) cholesterol. While the management of blood sugar has always been and remains a cornerstone of diabetes care, diabetes requires a comprehensive program of management that includes management of blood glucose, management of blood pressure and management of cholesterol. These are the ABCs of diabetes. The **A** stands for A1C, the test which measures average blood sugar over the previous 3 months. **B** is for blood pressure, and **C** is for cholesterol.

**Finding: Few people with diabetes surveyed could name important methods to reduce their risk of heart attack or stroke, such as taking prescription medications (18 percent), lowering cholesterol (8 percent), quitting smoking (7 percent), reducing blood pressure (5 percent) and taking aspirin (1 percent).**

**Fact:** In addition to managing weight and increasing physical activity, the treatment of high blood pressure and cholesterol, smoking cessation, taking aspirin, and the use of prescription medications such as angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors have been shown to reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke in people with diabetes. Efforts are needed to increase awareness of these potentially life-saving measures.

###