

# DIABETES

## GRAVE RISKS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

BY CAROLYN COLLINS

As the fastest growing chronic disease in Australia, diabetes presents one of the biggest health challenges of the 21st century but it is a risk that is often ignored or overlooked by people with disabilities, their carers and their doctors, according to a leading diabetes researcher.

Dr Katherine Samaras, who heads the Diabetes and Obesity Clinical Group at Sydney's Garvan Institute of Medical Research and is associate professor at the University of NSW, said diabetes often came "way down the list" for people grappling with mental or physical disabilities. This was despite research that showed that early intervention was critical in preventing serious complications like kidney disease, eye disease, nerve disease, amputations and heart disease.

"I am often asked to see people with disabilities five to 10 years too late and trying to then shed 50kg is extremely challenging," Dr Samaras said. "If you can get in there early it just prevents you creating new health problems down the track which are difficult to fix."

About 1.7 million Australians are estimated to have diabetes, of whom about half have never been diagnosed. By 2031, this number is expected to jump to 3.3 million. Most will have type 2 diabetes, which affects up to 90 per cent of all diabetes sufferers and which is sometimes described as the "lifestyle disease" because it is more common in people who are overweight, obese, have a poor diet and do insufficient exercise.

