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# LONGEVITY RACE

Icelandic men live longer than Japanese men, but Japanese women have longest life expectancy

## India, China lead “galloping” diabetes epidemic

WELLINGTON

India and China are leading a global explosion in the diabetes epidemic, with the numbers of sufferers worldwide expected to grow more than 50 percent by 2025. Paul Zimmet, a pioneering diabetes researcher and director of the International Diabetes Institute in Melbourne, Australia, said the number of people with type 2 diabetes is expected to increase from 250 million to 380 million by 2025.

“But it already appears those estimates may be an underestimate,” Zimmet said at the International Diabetes Federation’s Western Pacific Region congress in the New Zealand capital. “People look at you incredulously, but it’s a galloping epidemic.”

Rapid modernization in Asia means about two-thirds of all cases worldwide are found in the Asia-Pacific region, Zimmet said. “India and China are places where diabetes is positively exploding,” he said.

China, where more than 40 million people have type 2 diabetes or its precursor, appears to be taking the problem seriously. “It has become a national health priority in China,” he said.

Zimmet admitted he is frustrated the epidemic is growing so fast

### TWIN PROBLEMS

Obesity is helping fuel a diabetes epidemic in Asia, led by China and India.



AFP/REUTERS

more than 30 years after he warned it was imminent. He said governments have to realize diabetes needs to be tackled much more broadly than merely as a medical condition.

Said Zimmet: “Some governments are like nanny states, and they’re putting a lot of blame on individuals. I don’t see it that way. A lot of people who are fighting against obesity are just focusing on food advertising. I call these people the food Taliban because they’re ignoring changes in physical exercise in the community. Exercise is engineered out of our lives.”

He cited new housing areas in Australia built without footpaths and parents’ reluctance to let their children walk or cycle to school.

“So I would get governments to focus on creating an environment that’s conducive for people to do the things they should do to prevent—not only diabetes—but obesity and heart disease.”

## Europe pays heavy price for heart disease

BRUSSELS

Heart disease in Europe claims over two million lives every year, and cost the European Union US\$285 billion in 2006. A statistical study by the European Society of Cardiology and the European Heart Network also shows huge differences across Europe in death rates due to coronary artery disease and strokes, the two main types of heart disease.

Several countries in eastern and northern Europe—notably Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia, and Estonia—have mortality rates five to seven times higher than western European nations, especially France, Portugal, and Switzerland, the study showed.

Of the total cost of CVD in 2006, 57 percent was directly linked to health care, while 21 percent was attributed to productivity loss, and 22 percent to the cost of informal care provided by relatives and friends. The financial burden of heart disease resulted in a per capita cost of US\$581, the study concluded.

“Premature death and suffering from CVD is largely avoidable,” said Susanne Longstrup from the European Heart Network. Successful strategies in western European countries to reduce mortality related to heart disease should be extended throughout the continent, she said.

The European countries with the highest death rates for ischemic heart disease—which includes coronary-artery disease and heart attacks—are Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia, Estonia, and Latvia. At the other end of the scale are France, with the lowest rate, followed by Portugal, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland.

For cerebrovascular disease, mainly strokes, the most afflicted countries are Romania, Latvia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Estonia. Those least affected are Switzerland, Sweden, Italy, Spain, and Greece.

## Icelandic men live longest

REYKJAVIK

Icelandic men have the longest life expectancy in the world, living an average of 79.4 years in 2007.

“This is a world record. They live even longer than Japanese men,” said Oloef Gardarsdottir, a spokeswoman for Statistics Iceland. Japanese men live on average 78.6 years. “We don’t have an explanation. It’s really difficult to give a reason why,” she said.

Icelandic women meanwhile have a life expectancy of 82.9 years, among the highest in the world. Japanese women have an average life expectancy of nearly 86 years, according to United Nations statistics. Icelandic men and women lived on average more than 81 years in 2007, not far behind Japan at 82 years and ahead of France at almost 81 years.

The North Atlantic island has long lived off the fishing industry but has undergone a vast transformation since the mid-1990s, in particular due to a booming financial sector. The Nordic country is one of the richest in the world, and has a population of 313,400. **M**