

Diabetes taking toll on Africa – report

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The costs of diabetes in sub-Saharan Africa could double to almost \$60b annually just 13 years from now, as obesity fuels an explosion of the disease, a report said yesterday.

In 2015, the overall diabetes cost in the region was nearly \$20b, or 1.2% of total economic production, according to research published by *The Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology*.

This included medication and hospital stays, and loss of labour productivity due to illness or death.

About half of all treatment costs were paid for by patients themselves. “We estimate that the total cost will increase to between \$35.33b (1.1% of GDP)

and \$59.32b (1.8% of GDP) by 2030,” said the report compiled by more than 70 experts from around the world.

The rise of Type 2 or adult-onset diabetes in Sub-Saharan Africa has been fuelled by growing disposable income to spend on junk food, the shift to a more sedentary urban lifestyle, population growth and population ageing as healthcare improves.

The number of adults in the region classified as overweight increased from 28 million in 1980 to 127 million in 2015.

While in 1990, HIV/AIDS, diarrhoea, malaria and children’s diseases were among the region’s leading causes of death, today they are being replaced by heart disease.

“Diabetes and its complications have the potential

to reverse some of the health gains seen in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years – overwhelming the region’s health system and crippling patients’ personal finances as they pay for their own healthcare,” a statement said.

Today, only about half of diabetes sufferers in the region know they have the disease, and just one in 10 receives the necessary drugs.

“In its current state, sub-Saharan Africa is not at all prepared for the increasing burden of diabetes caused by rapid, ongoing societal transitions,” said lead author Rifat Atun of Harvard University.

Diabetes is a lifelong disorder that causes blood-sugar levels to be too high. Untreated, it can cause blindness, kidney failure, heart attacks and stroke.

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