

# Managed Care Takes On Diabetes

By Aimee Swartz

Closing the Gap, Diabetes • September/October 2002

Reducing the number of Americans who lose their eyesight each year as a result of diabetes—the leading cause of blindness in the United States—is the focus of a new campaign launched by the American Association of Health Plans (AAHP), the American Diabetes Association (ADA) and the Foundation for the American Academy of Ophthalmology.

A simple eye exam can lead to the prevention of blindness, but many people with diabetes fail to have their eyes checked on a regular basis. In fact, eye exams for people with diabetes are covered under most health plans across the country, but most patients are unaware of this benefit.

“Patients with diabetes are 25 times more likely than the general population to go blind,” said Saira Seema, AAHP’s program manager for diabetes. African Americans are 40-50 percent more likely to experience diabetic retinopathy, the condition that leads to blindness. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Latinos and American Indians also experience higher rates of diabetes and its complications.

The campaign targets these minority communities through Spanish and English public service announcements that are available in radio, television and print formats. Each ad, which features a grandmother who is terribly saddened by the loss of her sight to diabetes, highlights the need for people with diabetes to get their eyes checked. The ads also remind the viewer that eye exams for persons with diabetes are covered by health plans.

The campaign is part of the AAHP’s larger initiative, *Taking on Diabetes*, a long-term commitment to improving the lives of people with diabetes by dramatically reducing the negative health consequences associated with the disease. “AAHP member groups wanted to do something within the community to tackle diabetes. What resulted was *Taking on Diabetes*,” Seema said.

Health plans taking part in the initiative have committed to reducing the risk of vision loss, cardiovascular disease, end stage renal disease, and the loss of lower extremities for people with diabetes. The initiative, launched in 1999, promotes screening, early intervention and treatment. To date, approximately 200 health plans providing coverage for more than four million people with diabetes have committed to participate in the effort.

*New Mexico Health Care Takes on Diabetes*, the first pilot program, has created a uniform, tested, and proven guideline for care of patients with diabetes. As part of the program, health care providers across New Mexico implement procedures for care that minimize the sometimes life-threatening effects of diabetes.

*Taking on Diabetes* also includes models in Westchester County, NY, and Kansas City, MO. In Westchester County, the initiative provides physicians with a diabetes tool kit. The tool kit, available on the *Taking on Diabetes* Web site, includes outreach tools targeting patients, providers, and the community, as well as organizational flow sheets and charts designed to assist providers and health plans in diabetes care and management. In Kansas City, four health plans, along with provider groups and hospitals, are working to improve physician office practice systems to promote better outreach.

For more information, go to the *Taking on Diabetes* Web site at <http://www.takingondiabetes.org> ❖

