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Renewed call for sugar tax: ASO

The Australian Society of Ophthalmologists (ASO) has called on the Turnbull government to rethink its recent rejection of a sugar tax on soft drinks and begin putting strategies in place to address Australia's skyrocketing rates of type 2 diabetes.

The call comes during National Diabetes Week and just days after the country's first Health Tracker report card showed we are failing in the prevention of chronic disease.

Today's grim reality is that one in two Australians has a chronic disease.

Diabetes Australia statistics reveal around 280 Australians develop diabetes every day and that it outstrips heart disease and cancer as our fastest growing chronic condition.

The ASO says the picture is made even more bleak by the fact that more than 60% of Australians with type 2 diabetes (lifestyle diabetes) will develop diabetic eye disease within 20 years of diagnosis. Diabetic eye disease is a leading cause of irreversible blindness in Australian adults.

ASO President Dr Michael Steiner said "no-brainer" strategies like a tax on sugary drinks should be part of a list of items for immediate action by the government now it has been returned to power.

"This is especially important as most Australians are introduced to sugary drinks as children, thus starting a bad habit which becomes more difficult to stop," Dr Steiner said.

"An increase in price will see a decrease in consumption and give drink companies an incentive to reduce the sugar content in their products. It should not be regarded as a regressive tax, but rather as an incentive to drink more healthy alternatives," he said.

"Money generated by the tax can then be injected into preventative health and lifestyle programs.

"As the Health Tracker report card has highlighted, less than two per cent of government health spending is currently dedicated to prevention," Dr Steiner said.

A range of Australian health groups have pledged their support for a sugar tax, including the National Heart Foundation and the AMA and it is a strategy recommended by the World Health Organisation.

Ends.

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