



Discovery Health has invested significant resources in developing a holistic, digitally-enabled solution for our members who have diabetes - the Diabetes Care Programme

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2021 will see cutting-edge digital technology boost Discovery Health's Diabetes Care Programme

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In 2020 the COVID-19 global healthcare crisis has put the spotlight on people who live with diabetes. They are considered at risk of severe illness should they contract COVID-19 – particularly where the condition is poorly managed.

“Our core purpose - to make people healthier and enhance and protect their lives - has never been more relevant than in 2020,” says Dr Noluthando Nematswerani, Head of the Clinical Policy Unit at Discovery Health.

“For people who are diagnosed with diabetes, access to holistic care and the right digital technologies can make a world of difference to quality of life. Discovery Health has invested significant resources in developing a holistic, digitally-enabled solution for our members who have diabetes - the Diabetes Care Programme. And, we are excited to announce that, in 2021, these digital offerings will be enhanced by the introduction of Connected Care for chronic conditions – a user-friendly, end-to-end digital healthcare support system.”

“The current spotlight on diabetes has reinforced the absolute value of programmes that facilitate holistic management of this illness,” adds Dr Nematswerani. “The Diabetes Care Programme ensures access to personalised, high quality, coordinated healthcare that integrates seamlessly into a member’s life and enhances their partnership with their Premier Plus GP. The programme leverages incentives and technology to change patient behaviour, together with their doctor and a support team of healthcare professionals, towards better management of diabetes.

Discovery analyses to the landscape faced by people with chronic conditions in 2020

Since the onset of the pandemic, most global healthcare resources have been re-purposed to focus almost entirely on COVID-19. While a necessary shift, this resource re-allocation has brought major disruptions to routine care for patients with chronic illnesses and other non-COVID related healthcare needs.

- A [survey](#) of 202 healthcare professionals in 47 countries looked at which chronic diseases had been most impacted by a reduction in healthcare resources due to COVID-19. Respondents reported that diabetes care was most affected (38% impact).
- Discovery Health Medical Scheme data also shows a significant (60%) drop in HbA1c testing (a blood test used to monitor response to diabetes medicines) claims in April 2020 (coinciding with level 5 lockdown), compared with the same period in 2019. This has however improved to 10% for the month of September 2020.

People who have diabetes often have other chronic illnesses - such as obesity, hypertension or kidney disease – which collectively increase one’s vulnerability to severe illness in general, and particularly in the case of COVID-19. “The link between lifestyle behaviours and health risk is undeniable. This is why taking a proactive, holistic approach to preventing and managing diabetes is so crucial,” says Dr Mosima Mabunda, Discovery Vitality’s Head of Wellness. “Vitality’s shared value insurance model incentivises behaviour change thus empowering members to make healthier choices – something that must be a priority for all, but especially for those living with diabetes.”

A **healthy diet** is not only important for **preventing** chronic conditions, but is also crucial for **managing** chronic conditions. Healthy eating, regular physical activity, and taking prescribed medicine are all key components of managing chronic conditions. On the dietary side, cut out refined starches, added sugar, highly processed foods and saturated fats and lean towards whole plant foods such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes and healthy fats. The Vitality Healthy Food Catalogue encourages Vitality members to make healthier food choices. Vitality uses the Vitality Healthy Food Stamp on shelf-labels in their partner stores, Woolworths and Pick n Pay, and also on the web version of the catalogue, to help with identification of healthy food items.

Members of the 18 medical schemes administered by Discovery Health who have chronic conditions make up 88% of recorded COVID-19 hospital admissions across all schemes (data up to 6 August 2020).

Dr Nematswerani explains: “The case fatality rate ranges from 1.3% for people who have one chronic condition, to 12.5% for people with five or more chronic conditions. This can be compared to a 0.5% case fatality rate for scheme members who have no chronic conditions, highlighting the impact of chronic diseases on COVID-19 related deaths and the importance of prevention and early detection of non-communicable diseases through screening programmes.

“This is why we have made it a priority to bring the Discovery Health Diabetes Care Programme to every qualifying scheme member in 2020,” says Dr Nematswerani.

Screening key to detecting the early warning signs of diabetes and prevent progress of the condition

“People who have diabetes are generally at high risk of serious long-term complications, ranging from heart attacks to strokes, kidney failure, amputations, blindness and more,” says Dr Nematswerani. “Unfortunately diabetes often starts out as a silent disease (specifically Type 2 Diabetes) with symptoms such as frequent urination, blurry vision and fatigue may not cause immediate concern. Again, unless we ensure we’re doing our regular health and wellness screening and check-ups – that will look at our blood glucose levels, among other things – we may not heed the initial warning signs of diabetes.” The Vitality Health Check is a simple and convenient set of essential health screening and preventive tests including: blood Glucose, blood pressure, cholesterol, weight assessment and smoker’s declaration

Interestingly, the relationship between COVID-19 and diabetes appears to be bidirectional. While having diabetes can mean a more severe clinical presentation of COVID-19, having COVID-19 can accelerate the progress to confirmed diabetes in people who have undiagnosed or early-stage diabetes.

“Ensuring that we visit our healthcare providers for our routine wellness tests will allow us to detect any signs of undiagnosed diabetes as early as possible and nip its progress or complications in the bud,” adds Dr Nematswerani.

Diabetes Care members show a 6 % lower rate of hospital admission in general

A comparison between the 38 000 members enrolled on Diabetes Care and scheme members who are not yet enrolled shows that participating members experience more regular monitoring of their condition through a:

- 20 % **higher** rate of HbA1c testing
- 20 % **higher** rate of lipogram testing
- 22 % **higher** rate of GP visits

Ultimately, members enrolled in the Diabetes Care Programme show a **6 % lower rate** of hospital admission in general compared to non-members.

- *The Diabetes Care Programme allows members to:*

- Manage their condition **according to their unique needs** – and always in partnership with their Premier Plus GP.

- Track all condition-related progress (with their GP) on a personalised dashboard which displays their **unique Diabetes Scorecard**, guiding the particular steps they should take to manage their condition and stay healthy going forward.
- Access cover for an **additional** consultation with a **dietitian** (in **addition** to the consultation already offered through the Chronic Illness Benefit) **and a consultation with a biokineticist** every year
- (For those who qualify) access **support from a diabetes educator** who will help them to adhere to the treatment plan prescribed by their Premier Plus GP.
- Members can activate **“Track your health”** on the Discovery app and start earning rewards for monitoring and improving their health status, and for using **“Medicine tracker”** which prompts members to take their medicine as prescribed.

The increased adoption of digital healthcare, accelerated by COVID-19, has highlighted the patient’s home as an important and relevant setting for healthcare. In 2021, the **Diabetes Care Programme will be enhanced through Discovery Health’s new Connected Care** Platform. Through this, scheme members will access digital condition-specific clinical content, integration with remote health monitoring devices appropriate for their condition and personalised health coaching to better manage and track their chronic condition/s at home. “The advanced, integrated reporting process provides automatic trigger alerts to a member’s treating doctor,” explains Dr Nematswerani.

- *Once Discovery Health Medical Scheme members have registered on the Chronic Illness Benefit, their Premier Plus GP can enrol them onto the Diabetes Care Programme. This unlocks their access to Diabetes Care’s comprehensive basket of personalised benefits and tools.*
- *Members registered for the Diabetes Care Programme benefit from additional benefits including consultations with a dietitian and biokineticist, and access to a nurse-led diabetic education programme.*
- *The Scheme also created the Premier Plus GP Network to support the Diabetes Care Programme with extensive coverage.*

Access to optimal diabetes management means access to long-term quality of life

“We encourage our members who are at-risk of or those already living with diabetes, to reach out to a Premier Plus GP on our network ([through the Discovery website](#)), to book a consultation and discuss joining the Diabetes Care Programme with their Premier Plus GP and access support that will elevate their wellbeing – and that, in the time of COVID-19, could prove life-saving. Ultimately, the Diabetes Care Programme offers every member a chance to access quality of life long-term and to avoid the significant complications associated with diabetes in the time of COVID-19 and going forward ,” adds Dr Nematswerani.

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Find out more

Find out more about the [Diabetes Care Programme](#).

Find out more about earning rewards through “[Track your health](#)” on the Discovery app.

Find out more about the Vitality Health Check

Read [Hilton Coltman's](#) experience with the Diabetes Care Programme.

References

[Chudasama YV, Gillies CL, Zaccardi F et al. Impact of COVID-19 on routine care for chronic diseases: A global survey of views from healthcare professionals. Diabetes & Metabolic Syndrome: Clinical Research & Reviews 14 \(2020\)](#)

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Discovery information

About Discovery

Discovery Limited is a South African-founded financial services organisation that operates in the healthcare, life assurance, short-term insurance, savings and investment and wellness markets. Since inception in 1992, Discovery has been guided by a clear core purpose – to make people healthier and to enhance and protect their lives. This has manifested in its globally recognised Vitality Shared-Value insurance model, active in 24 markets with over 20 million members. The model is exported and scaled through the Global Vitality Network, an alliance of some of the largest insurers across key markets including AIA (Asia), Ping An (China), Generali (Europe), Sumitomo (Japan), John Hancock (US), Manulife (Canada) and Vitality Life & Health (UK, wholly owned). Discovery trades on the Johannesburg Securities Exchange as DSY.

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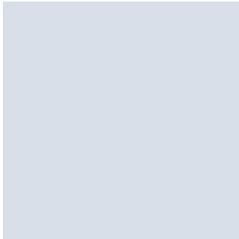
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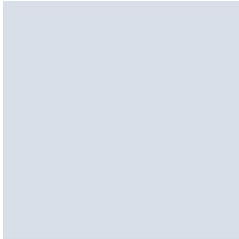
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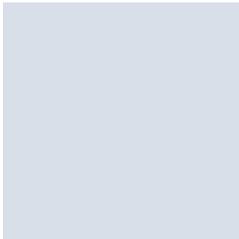
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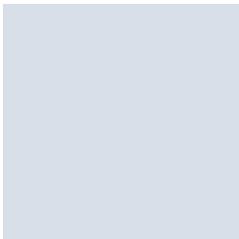
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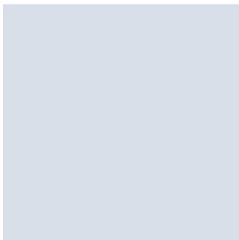
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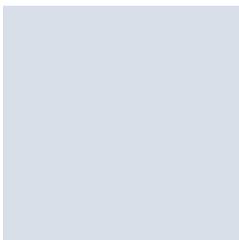
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