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## Diabetes patients support each other through new group

A new peer support initiative in the Wollondilly Shire is supporting diabetes patients by improving their wellbeing, self-management and helping them to connect with the right health services at the Wollondilly Community Health Centre and Campbelltown Hospital.

The Wollondilly Diabetes Program (WDP) funded by the Wollondilly Health Alliance offers people an opportunity to improve their quality of life through mutual support and education. Campbelltown Hospital endocrinologist, researcher and Western Sydney University Professor of Medicine, David Simmons said the initiative was a great example of how community power and mentorship could bring about positive change.

"Many people who have diabetes have never talked to anyone else with diabetes which can be very isolating," Prof Simmons said.

"The WDP provides people with the opportunity to share knowledge, experiences, emotions, and solutions with other people who are living with diabetes.

Prof Simmons said of the 46,000 residents in the Wollondilly Shire, there were about 2100 people living with diabetes mellitus and 15,000 people who were at risk of diabetes.

"We know one in 10 adults living in south western Sydney has diabetes," Prof Simmons said.

"Peer support can lead to many positive experiences but it does not replace the advice you get from your health professional, you should always consult your health professional before making changes to your diabetes management," he Prof Simmons said.

Prof Simmons said the group was currently recruiting for peer support facilitators who were motivated and happy to share their experiences so other people could improve their condition with confidence.

"WDP is currently recruiting peer support facilitators to enable Wollondilly residents living with diabetes to self-manage their condition and to support them on their journey to wellbeing.

"The program can supplement and reinforce the knowledge offered by health professionals and enable people to better self-manage their condition. We are grateful to local GPs and practice nurses for their help," Prof Simmons said.

Wollondilly Shire Council Mayor, Judith Hannan highlighted the importance of peer support for people with diabetes and the important role of local health professionals in supporting peer support initiatives.

"I'd like to encourage those that are interested to attend a free workshop on healthy lifestyle habits and free group education from a diabetes dietician and diabetes educator.

"Diabetes is a big challenge confronting the area and appropriately funded peer support programs are one tool we can use to improve health outcomes for people with all types of diabetes," Ms Hannan said.

If you would like to become a volunteer or know of anyone with diabetes who would benefit from the WDP, please contact [WDP@westernsydneyedu.au](mailto:WDP@westernsydneyedu.au) or phone 0415 336 153.