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Australian Government's timely initiative on insulin pump subsidy

The rising incidence of Type 1 diabetes in children underlines the importance of the Rudd Government's decision to subsidise the cost of insulin pumps.

According to a report released today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), the incidence of new cases of Type 1 diabetes in children is rising at around 3 per cent a year. There were more than 6,000 new cases in children aged 0–14 years between 2000 and 2006, which equates to more than two new cases each day.

In the 2008-09 Budget, the Government announced that it would subsidise the cost of insulin pumps for young people with type 1 diabetes from 1 November 2008.

The Government will provide a means-tested subsidy of up to \$2,500 for people with type 1 diabetes under the age of 18. This targeted subsidy of between \$500 and \$2,500, based on gross family income, will help nearly 700 children and young people.

The Government subsidy will make insulin pumps more affordable for working families and help parents care for children with this chronic disease.

Pumps reduce the need for parental supervision in looking after a child with type 1 diabetes. They allow the child to participate in normal activities like school, sport and social functions with less constant monitoring.

Insulin pump therapy significantly reduces severe hypoglycaemic episodes and provides major improvements in the control of blood glucose. Insulin pump therapy also has the potential to reduce the long term risk of retinal eye disease.

An insulin pump is a small, computerised device that delivers insulin constantly under the skin through a plastic tube, removing the need for regular insulin injections. The pump is programmed to give small background doses of insulin continuously throughout the day and night depending on the individual's needs.

The insulin pump subsidy will complement other Government measures assisting people with diabetes. Government funding committed to support people with diabetes is substantial. Last financial year, Government expenditure on diabetic products supplied through the National Diabetes Services Scheme exceeded \$126 million and expenditure on medicines for diabetes through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, such as insulin, exceeded \$300 million.

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