

Continuing to provide supports and services

The virtual Diabetes Ireland AGM heard how staff worked around the clock to continue supporting its members, writes **Deborah Condon**



With the Covid-19 pandemic still having a major impact on people's lives, the decision was taken by Diabetes Ireland to hold its 2021 AGM virtually for the second time.

According to the charity's Chairperson, Prof Hilary Hoey, the last 20 months has been an extremely tough period, with charities left "deeply impacted, under-resourced and drained from the pandemic".

"Eight out of 10 charities are worried about their ability to maintain services. In Diabetes Ireland, we are also feeling that impact," she noted.

However, despite this, the charity worked around the clock to try to ensure that those with diabetes and their loved ones were provided with the vital supports and services that they needed.

In his presentation to the AGM, Diabetes Ireland CEO, Kieran O'Leary, highlighted some of these.

He noted that the Diabetes Ireland helpline received over 4,500 calls between January 1 and September 30 of this year, with the vast majority of these calls about diabetes management and access to services.

The Diabetes Ireland website recorded almost 375,000 page views and the charity's social media reach increased across all platforms.

Over 1,100 diabetes risk assessments were carried out online and among these, 28% were deemed to be high risk.

Moving to online support

The very successful CODE education programme, which consists of four two-hour sessions for people with Type 2 diabetes, was carried out virtually throughout the year. A total of 24 programmes were initiated during the first nine months of 2021.

"There was a huge workload involved in developing CODE as a virtual programme, but we are getting better attendance now, including more younger people," Mr O'Leary noted.

Other supports included virtual programmes for the parents of children and teenagers with Type 1 and a series of educational webinars, which covered topics as wide ranging as how to optimise remote consultations and how to prepare for pregnancy.

Mr O'Leary noted that the top topics that have been requested for 2022

webinars are nutrition, mental health and diabetes technology.

Webinars and conferences

Diabetes Ireland also organised multiple webinars and conferences for healthcare professionals, including a Paediatric Diabetes Study Day in November

The charity also provided 25 sessions of its carers' education programme to the staff of nursing homes and intellectual disability centres who would be looking after residents living with diabetes. Diabetes Ireland also continues its involvement in the health promotion research project with the Men's Sheds organisation.

It also continued to advocate in schools in a number of ways, including a back-to-school awareness campaign in August and September and a training day aimed at teachers and SNAs, which was facilitated by the Cork University Hospital paediatric team.

TEST campaign

Meanwhile, the TEST campaign was successfully launched in May 2021 – its aim was to raise awareness among the general public about the symptoms of

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Type 1 diabetes.

And as always, advocacy remains key. Diabetes Ireland advocated for change at a national level for both children and adults, including advocating for priority access to Covid vaccines.

Expenditure

Financially, all of these initiatives come at a hefty price. For example, the average cost of one call to the helpline is €25 (in terms of staff and resources). With the charity typically averaging around 6,000 calls per year, that amounts to €150,000.

Each webinar costs in the region of €4,000-5,000, while the CODE programme costs €200,000 per year.

"We are doing things on a shoestring budget with a small team of staff. We are doing our utmost to support people, but our resources are limited," Mr O'Leary warned.

This was confirmed by the charity's Treasurer's Report, which showed that while the 2021 figures look healthy, a

number of key risks have been identified, "which may severely impact the charity going forward".

The report showed that in the 12-month period to June 30, 2021, Diabetes Ireland had a net surplus of €413,866 for the period.

Funding

However, honorary treasurer, Collette McLoughlin, highlighted that a stability funding grant from Pobal of over €267,000, which helped the charity to cover annual overheads, such as rent, heating bills and insurance, is a one-off grant.

"This grant inflates our income and profit for the period and we will not have that income going forward," she explained.

HSE funding has also reduced and while sponsorship is up, income derived from annual membership is down, as is community fundraising income. As a result, the medium-term outlook is "not good".

"The board has undertaken some

budget forecasting for the next 12 months, which is forecasting a loss of approximately €300,000 in the current year.

Into next year

"More positively, the profit from this year will provide a cushion for the next 12-18 months, but we will need to keep a very close eye on our expenditure and ensure we are in a position to have a balanced budget for 2023," Ms McLoughlin noted.

However, despite these concerns and the impact of the Covid pandemic, Diabetes Ireland is determined to continue to provide supports and services to people with diabetes, their loved ones and professionals working in this area.

"The demands on our services and staff and volunteers have increased more than ever this year and on behalf of the directors, I would like to acknowledge each and every staff member and volunteer and thank them for all their efforts," Prof Hoey added.

