

Health Beliefs of Pacific Islanders Regarding Type 2 Diabetes

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The Pacific Islander Population suffers from disproportionate rates of type 2 diabetes. Diabetes self-management and prevention behavior among Pacific Islanders is low. Few Pacific Islanders have participated in diabetes self-management education, and previous attempts to implement diabetes self-management among Pacific Islanders have had limited success. Using a community-engaged approach, a Community Advisory Board led a needs assessment where diabetes was chosen by the community as a top concern. Given the need identified by the community, as well as the limited literature on Pacific Islander beliefs or behaviors related to diabetes, it is important to explore and understand how Pacific Islanders perceive and respond to diabetes. Guided by the Health Beliefs Model, this study examined the underlying beliefs and perceptions that affect diabetes self-management behavior among the Pacific Islander population living in Arkansas. After training community co-investigators in research methods, qualitative data was collected from 41 participants in six focus groups conducted at the local community center. The Pacific Islander community co-investigators participated throughout the research process to ensure that cultural context and nuances in meaning were accurately captured and presented. The findings of the study delineate how Pacific Islanders: 1) show a high perceived threat, with most participants describing diabetes as inevitable and a death sentence; 2) are generally unaware of the benefits of diabetes self-management behaviors; and 3) face significant policy, environmental, and systems barriers to diabetes self-management. The Health Beliefs Model provides important contributions that can help advance diabetes self-management efforts within Pacific Islander communities.