CAUSES AND RATES OF DIABETES

- Diabetes is a chronic and lifelong disease marked by high blood sugar.¹
- The onset of diabetes is triggered by genetics and lifestyle factors, such as smoking, diet, and exercise levels.²
- Symptoms of diabetes include increased thirst, increased urination, increased hunger, weight loss, fatigue, blurred vision, slow healing cuts and bruises and frequent infections.³
- More than 827,000 adults in Illinois have been diagnosed with diabetes,⁴ and another 500,000 adults are unaware they have the disease.⁵

EFFECTS OF DIABETES

- Diabetes is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States.⁶
- Each year in Illinois more than 2,700 people die from diabetes.⁷
- Individuals with diabetes are at increased risk for heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, blindness, kidney disease and failure, and non-traumatic lower extremity amputations.⁸
- The rate of type 2 diabetes among minorities, other than Alaska Native people, is two to six times greater than that of the white population in the United States.⁹
- The total economic cost of diabetes in the United States in 2012 was $245 billion, including $176 billion in medical costs and $69 billion in reduced productivity.¹⁰
- After adjusting for population age and sex differences, average medical expenditures among people diagnosed with diabetes are 2.3 times higher than what expenditures would be in the absence of diabetes.¹¹

ACCESS TO HEALTH AND DIABETES

- Health care interventions that take into consideration cultural and population-specific characteristics can reduce the prevalence and severity of diabetes and resulting complications.¹²
- Many immigrants are reluctant to apply for public benefits that may prevent or help manage diabetes because they believe that doing so will make them ineligible for permanent residency and citizenship.¹³
- Nearly half of immigrants are uninsured, compared to 15% of American citizens.¹⁴
- Social, cultural, and administrative barriers lead to lower access and under-utilization of health care, including preventative measures, among immigrants. For example, immigrants are less likely to discuss diet and exercise with health professionals.¹⁵
- Diabetes prevalence increases with length of residency in the United States.¹⁶

LEGAL INTERVENTIONS AVAILABLE

Multiple public benefits and other programs offer assistance to people with, or at risk of, diabetes. For example, the Therapeutic Diet Allowance provides additional cash assistance to low-income individuals who must adhere to prescribed diets. In addition, Illinois offers multiple insurance and prescription medication programs. Applying for many of these programs, including Food Stamps, Medicaid, and CHIP, cannot affect an undocumented immigrant’s application for citizenship in the future.¹⁷ The Health Justice Project educates patients on benefits and represents patients in appeals of public benefits.
The Health Justice Project is a medical-legal partnership
between Loyola University Chicago School of Law and Erie Family Health Center. Students and practitioners of law, social work, public health and medicine engage in interprofessional collaboration to combat poverty and achieve health justice through social, legal and policy solutions.

For more information about our work, visit www.luc.edu/healthjustice.