Partnerships change diabetes trends

By Michael F. Broderick

Diabetes is growing at an epidemic rate in the United States, and that unfortunately includes Hawaii. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly 30 million Americans have diabetes. In Hawaii, I out of every 2 adults either has pre-diabetes or diabetes, and many don’t realize it.

Sadly, diabetes is a leading cause of other chronic diseases like kidney disease. Risk factors for diabetes include being over 45 years old, overweight, having high blood pressure, physical inactivity and a family history of diabetes.

The statistics and health consequences are daunting; but through a collaborative effort of state agencies, private insurers and community organizations, Hawaii is helping to lead the nation toward better health.

In October 2016 in Hawaii, we launched the YMCA’s Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) as part of a national YUSA preventive service project with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The YMCA’s DPP is proven to lower the incidence of Type 2 diabetes by 58 percent, and 71 percent in adults over age 60. Locally, we joined in a public campaign led by the state Department of Health featuring comedian Frank De Lima, who himself has Type 2 diabetes, to alert people of the increasing risk of developing diabetes.

Residents were encouraged to take a one-minute quiz online, and those at risk could then take action by participating in a nationally recognized DPP offered by the YMCA of Honolulu.

This is a year-long program that helps create healthy lifestyles by eating healthier, increasing physical activity and losing a modest amount of weight. In a classroom setting, a trained lifestyle coach facilitates a small group of participants over 25 sessions.

The goals for participants are to reduce body weight by 7 percent and increase physical activity to 150 minutes per week. Of the 100 people enrolled since late 2016, participants averaged 5.5 percent weight loss and 195 minutes of physical activity per week.

The session themselves are collaborative and fun. Participants encourage each other, sharing obstacles and good ideas for developing a healthier lifestyle. We have received letters, emails and texts from past and present participants saying they are eating healthier, having more energy, and losing weight gradually and keeping it off. Their biggest complaint seems to be having to shop for smaller size pants after dropping two waist sizes.

The cost of the YMCA’s DPP is $429 per participant. So we were very encouraged when on April 1, Medicare rolled out nationwide full coverage of the cost for its providers with no cost to patients. UH Health Insurance was an early partner with the YMCA, providing the program as a fully-covered benefit. Kaiser Permanente also partners to offer the program for some members and also to support undererved or economically challenged adults at risk for diabetes. IMSA is evaluating offering DPP as a covered benefit. We are excited to work with our state’s health insurance providers so that more residents can take advantage of this new initiative.

Simple lifestyle changes can improve the health and wellness of so many who have pre-diabetes or diabetes. This is possible only by enrolling many community partners are pulling together to make our residents healthier. Health collaboratives like this can, and should, be a model for our state.