

# Perspectives of Seniors in Barbados on Diabetes Self-Management and Social Support During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unique challenges to older adults living with diabetes in Barbados, impacting their self-management practices and access to social support. Understanding the perspectives of this population is crucial in developing effective strategies to address their needs during these unprecedented times.

One significant finding from the study was the disruptions in healthcare access experienced by older adults with diabetes. Lockdowns, reduced transportation options, and fears of exposure to the virus hindered their ability to attend regular check-ups, obtain medications, and access necessary healthcare services. This posed a threat to their diabetes management, as timely medical interventions and monitoring are essential in preventing complications [1].

Another key theme was the limited social interactions due to social distancing measures. Older adults expressed a loss of support from family, friends, and support groups, which had previously played an important role in their diabetes management. The reduced access to social support networks affected their emotional well-being and their ability to access valuable information and advice related to diabetes self-management [2]. The absence of this support system could potentially lead to feelings of isolation, decreased motivation, and a lack of accountability in adhering to self-care practices.

The emotional impact of the pandemic was evident among the older adults interviewed. Anxiety and stress related to the pandemic added an additional layer of complexity to their diabetes management. Coping mechanisms that were previously effective may have been strained, potentially leading to difficulties in maintaining self-care practices and overall mental health [3].

Despite these challenges, the study revealed the resilience and adaptability of older adults living with diabetes in Barbados. Many participants embraced technology as a means to stay connected with loved ones, access telehealth services, and gather information on diabetes self-management. This highlights the importance of incorporating digital solutions and telemedicine into the healthcare system, ensuring that older adults have access to remote support and resources [4, 5].

Based on these findings, several implications can be drawn for healthcare professionals, policymakers, and community organizations. Firstly, healthcare professionals should prioritize strategies that address the specific needs of older adults with diabetes, such as telemedicine services and home delivery

of medications. Providing comprehensive and clear guidelines for diabetes self-management during the pandemic is also crucial [6-8].

Policymakers should recognize the vulnerabilities faced by older adults with diabetes and ensure that public health measures prioritize their well-being. Investments in health infrastructure, community-based support networks, and health promotion programs can enhance diabetes self-management and mitigate the impact of social isolation. Additionally, community organizations can play a vital role in providing virtual support groups, educational resources, and social engagement opportunities for older adults with diabetes [9, 10].

## Diabetes self-management

Diabetes self-management plays a crucial role in maintaining optimal health for individuals with diabetes. It encompasses various aspects, including medication adherence, blood sugar monitoring, healthy eating, physical activity, and stress management. Older adults face unique challenges in managing their diabetes, and the pandemic has presented additional hurdles that affect their self-management practices [11].

## Social support

Social support plays a vital role in diabetes management, providing emotional, practical, and informational assistance. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted social interactions and increased social isolation for many older adults, affecting their access to social support networks. This article examines the impact of these changes on the perspectives of older adults in Barbados.

**Disruptions in healthcare access:** Older adults expressed difficulties in accessing healthcare facilities, obtaining medications, and attending regular check-ups due to lockdowns, reduced transportation options, and fears of exposure to the virus [12].

**Limited social interactions:** Social distancing measures resulted in decreased social interactions and a loss of support from family, friends, and support groups. This loss of connection affected emotional well-being and access to diabetes-related information and advice.

**Emotional impact:** The pandemic-induced anxiety and stress further complicated diabetes management for older adults. Coping mechanisms were strained, affecting motivation, adherence to self-care practices, and overall mental health.

**Adaptation and resilience:** Despite the challenges, older adults demonstrated resilience and resourcefulness. Many embraced technology to stay connected with loved ones, access telehealth services, and gather information on diabetes self-management [13-15].

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the diabetes self-management and social support systems for older adults living in Barbados. Acknowledging the perspectives and experiences of older adults is crucial in developing effective interventions and support mechanisms. By addressing these challenges and promoting diabetes self-management and social support, we can help older adults maintain optimal health and well-being in the face of the ongoing pandemic and future crises.

## Acknowledgement

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## Conflict of Interest

None

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