

Good vision for life[®]

An Optometry Australia initiative

2022 Vision Index

Taking a closer look at Australians' eye health

Preface

In 2020, Optometry Australia commissioned research to gain a broad understanding of Australians' attitudes, beliefs and behaviours around maintaining their eye health. The resulting inaugural Vision Index was launched just before the onset of the global pandemic.

We felt it was prudent to conduct similar research in 2022, to understand if and how things may have changed and what impact the pandemic may have had on Australians and their eye health.

Much like the 2020 Vision Index, this year's report reveals a nation that places great importance on eye health in principle, yet misconceptions remain barriers to maintaining it.

The 2022 Vision Index found that while three in four Australians value vision as their most important sense, eye health issues have increased at a rate of concern to Optometry Australia. Despite this increase in issues, many Australians have never seen an optometrist (13%) or had an eye examination within the last two years (26%).

And while the COVID-19 lockdowns have exacerbated behaviours such as time spent on screens, there has been little change to the actions taken by Australians to monitor and protect their own or their children's vision.

The research shows that issues are on the rise, with nearly all Australians (97%) reporting concerns with their eyesight over the course of the pandemic and compared to our data from 2020 (94%).

These trends are troubling as they reveal Australians are neglecting important eye care that can ensure they maintain good vision for life.

Of those 13% of survey respondents who have never had an eye examination with an optometrist, 29% have neglected an assessment as they believe their vision is perfect, 28% because they believe it is too expensive and 15% because they are afraid of the results.

Of the 86% who have had their eyes checked, 26% had their last visit to an optometrist in 2019 or earlier, while almost one in three (31%) had to postpone their appointment due to COVID restrictions.

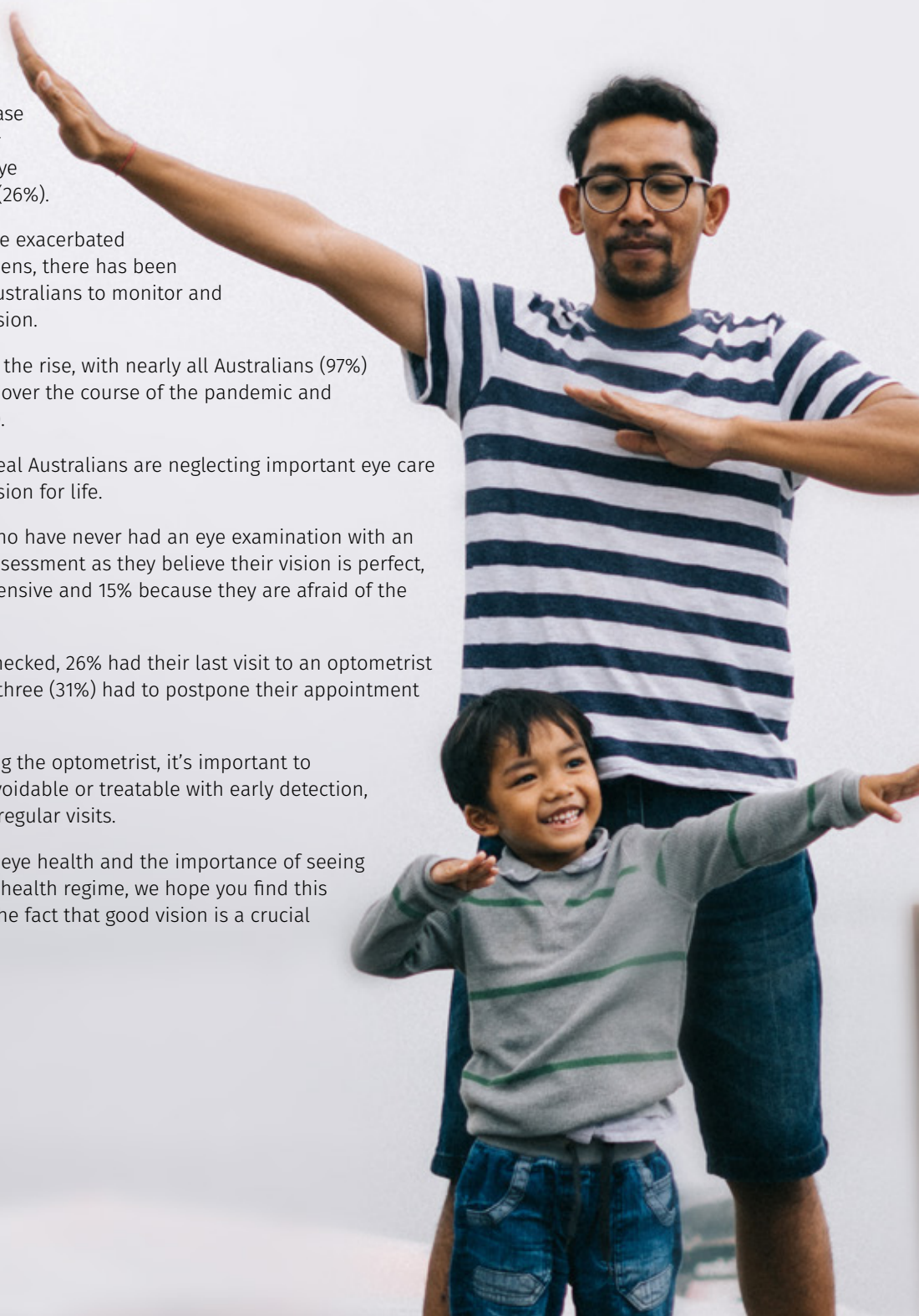
While COVID-19 impeded people visiting the optometrist, it's important to remember that 90% of vision loss is avoidable or treatable with early detection, which is why it's important to resume regular visits.

In our quest to raise awareness about eye health and the importance of seeing an optometrist as part of your regular health regime, we hope you find this report interesting, and help promote the fact that good vision is a crucial factor for living a healthy, happy life.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luke Arundel', written in a cursive style.

Luke Arundel
Chief Clinical Officer,
Optometry Australia



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The 2022 Vision Index was conducted via an online survey by Empirica Research on behalf of Optometry Australia. The survey sampled 1,000 demographically representative Australians from 25 February 2022 to 3 March 2022.



Section 1

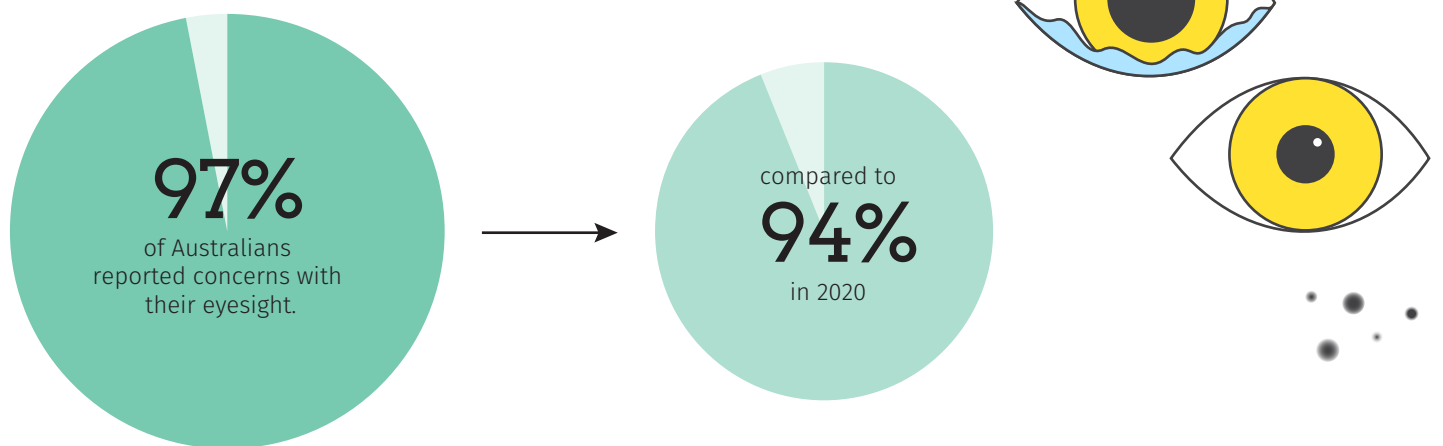
Australian Eye Health in 2022

Overall, nearly all Australians have experienced issues with their vision such as sore and tired eyes or difficulty seeing (97% of respondents in the survey indicated having experienced at least one of the several eye issues that were listed in the survey questions).

The 2022 Vision Index shows that three-quarters of Australians consider their vision to be their most important sense and 86% are at least slightly concerned about their eye health.

Eye health problems are increasing

Compared to 2020 research, a higher proportion of Australians in 2022 reported experiences with eye-related issues such as dry, irritated or watery eyes, itchy eyes, and sensitivity to light.



60% are worried about the quality of their eyesight

Up 1% from 2020

81% have difficulty seeing things far away

Up 5% from 2020

76% have difficulty seeing things close up

Up 6% from 2020

85% had experienced dry, irritated or watery eyes

Up 8% from 2020

85% had experienced itchy eyes

Up 8% from 2020

71% had experienced dots in their vision

Up 9% from 2020

80% had experienced sensitivity to light

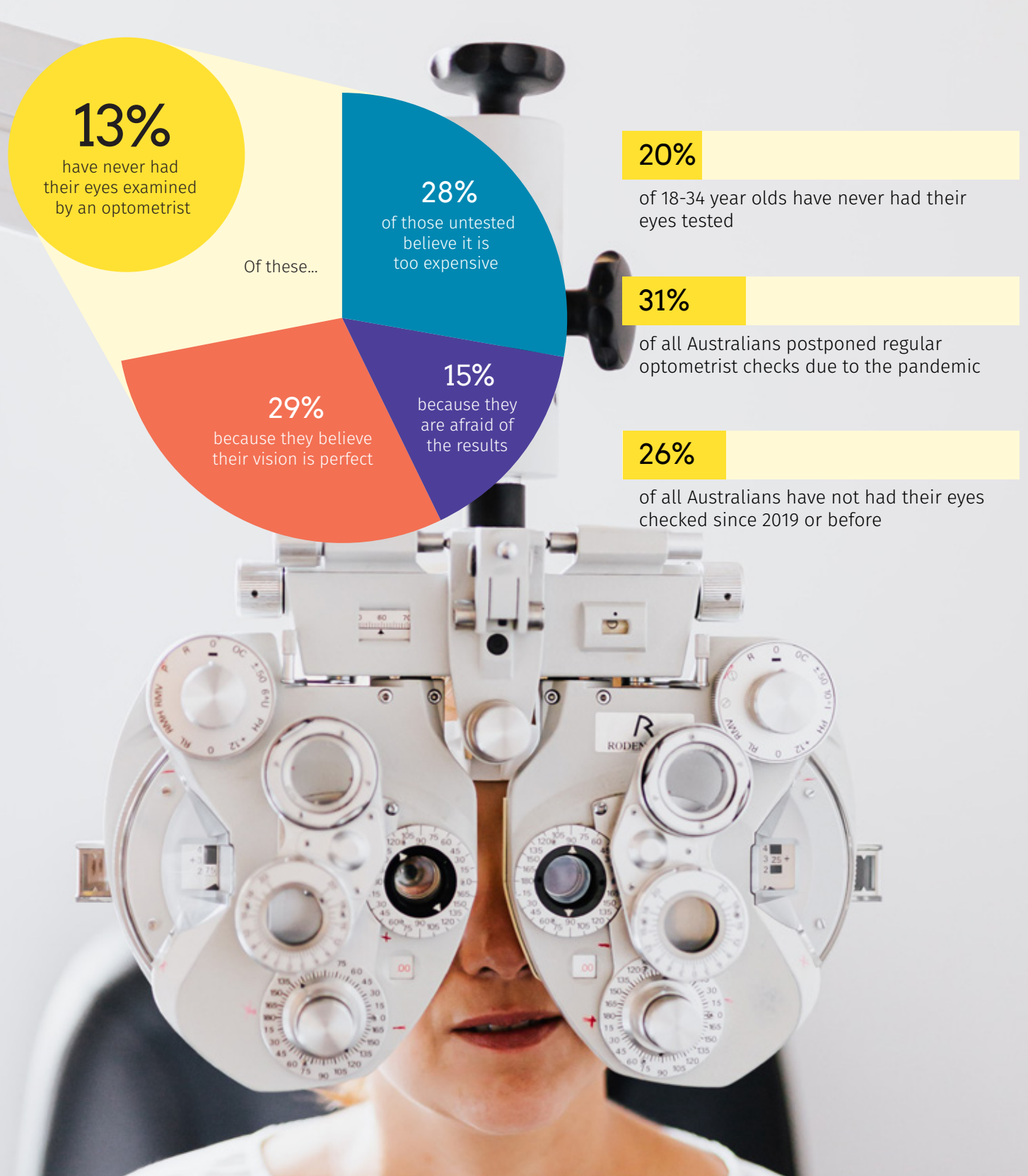
Up 9% from 2020

Section 1 Australian Eye Health in 2022

Concerningly however, 13% of Australians have never had an eye examination with an optometrist, which is consistent with the findings of the 2020 research.

What we can ultimately determine from the comparison between the two research reports is that while eye health issues are on the rise, Australians' behaviours to address this have not shifted. Despite the reasons given below, Australians are recommended to have their eyes tested every two years to maintain good vision for life.

Australians are still neglecting important treatment



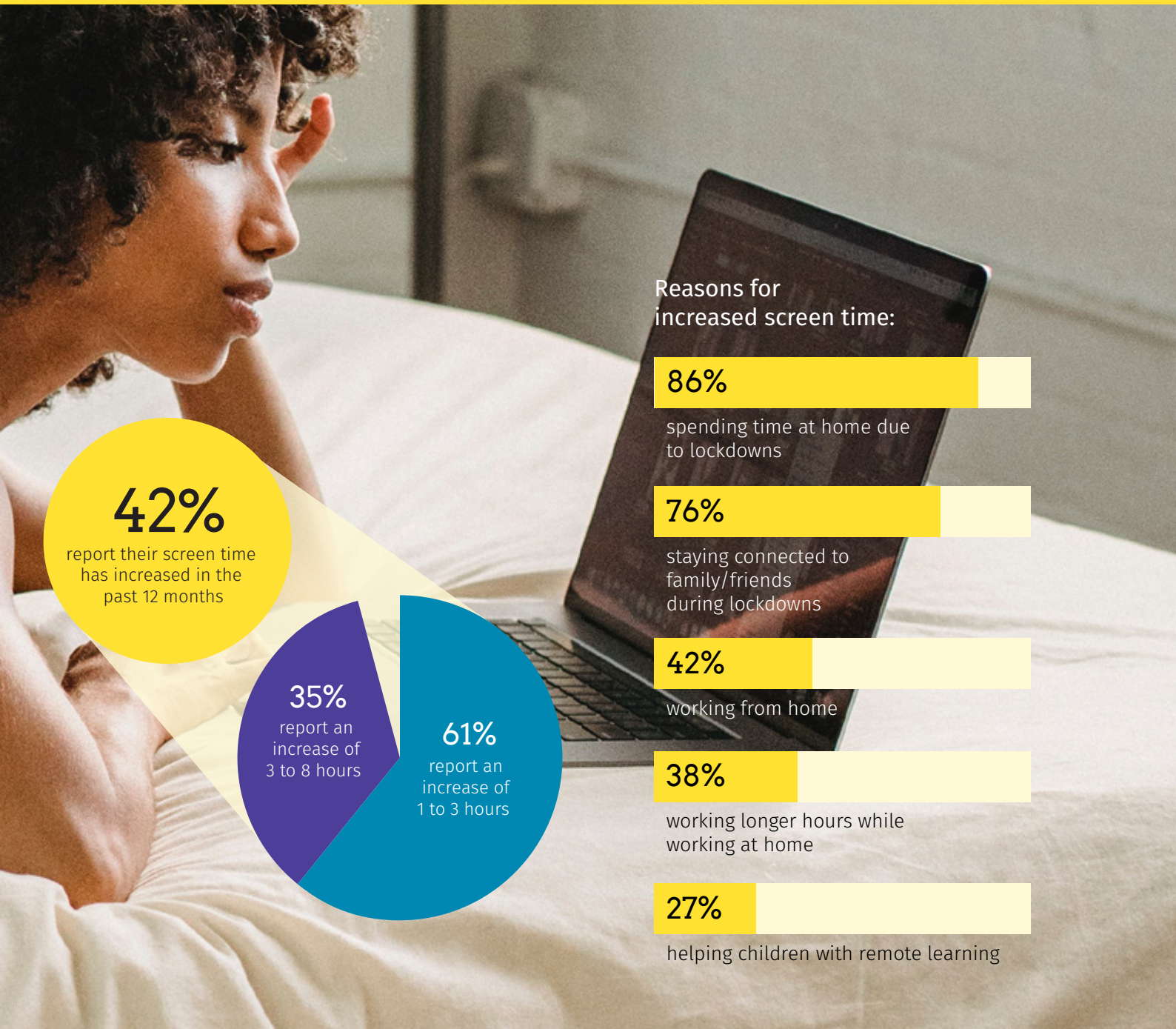
Section 2

The Pandemic Effect

Over the past two years, few areas of life have remained unaffected by the global pandemic. As COVID-19 spread across Australia, measures were introduced to limit the spread of the virus and treat those affected. These included restrictions put in place to contain its impact on the community and, in varying degrees throughout 2020 and 2021, non-essential business and activities shut down with Australians urged to stay at home.

Many were forced into a kind of virtual existence as, almost overnight, people were urged away from real world interactions to the online space where social interactions, work and schooling took place on computer screens.

Unsurprisingly, in 2022 the research showed that 42% of Australians reported that the amount of time they spent looking at screens increased over the past 12 months.



Reasons for increased screen time:

86%

spending time at home due to lockdowns

76%

staying connected to family/friends during lockdowns

42%

working from home

38%

working longer hours while working at home

27%

helping children with remote learning

42%

report their screen time has increased in the past 12 months

35%

report an increase of 3 to 8 hours

61%

report an increase of 1 to 3 hours

Section 2 The Pandemic Effect

Likewise, compared to our 2020 research, a higher proportion of Australians in 2022 reported experiences with eye-related issues such as dry, irritated or watery eyes, itchy eyes, sensitivity to light and floating dots. And 11% of respondents who said they experienced dry eye said that this condition worsened during the pandemic.

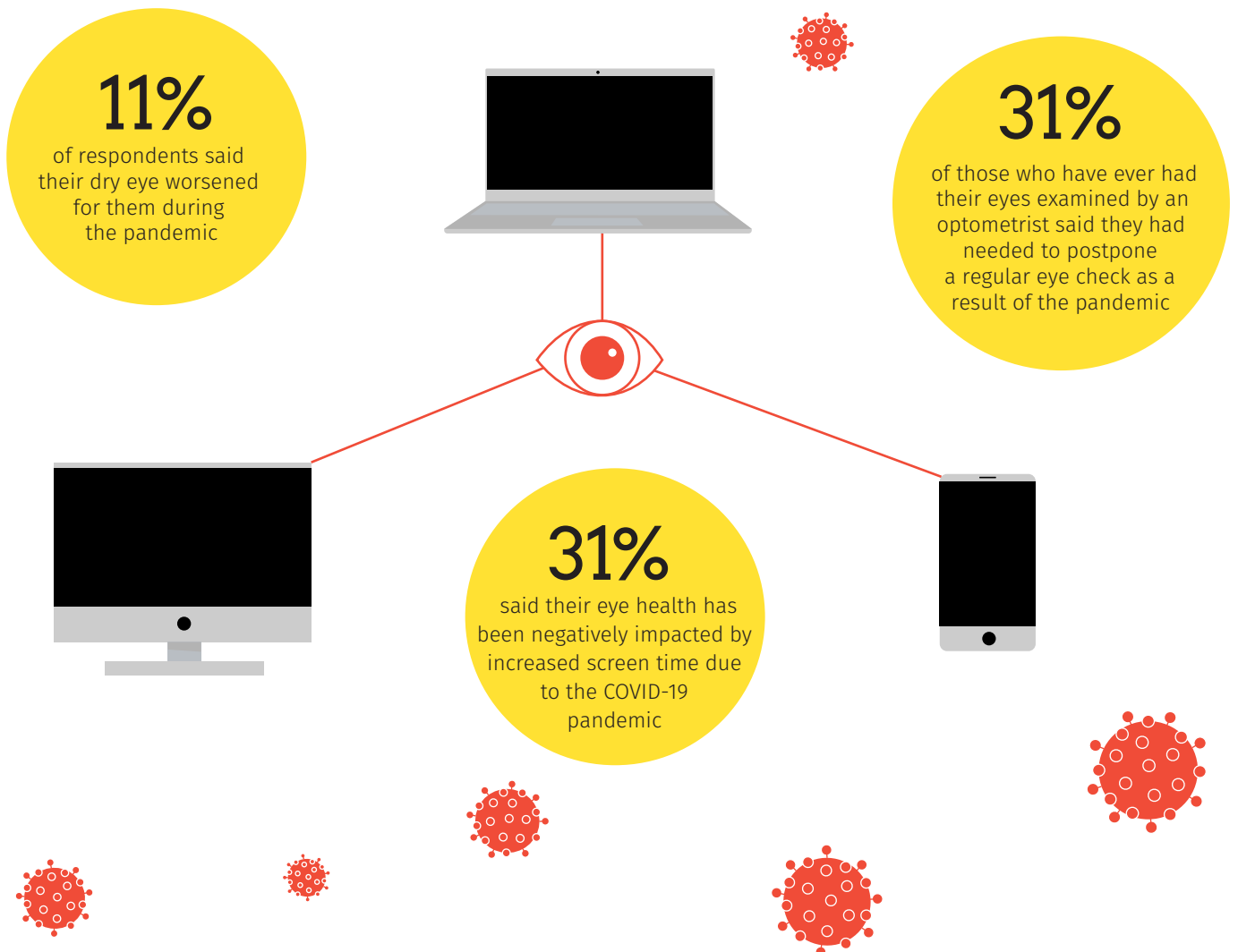
Despite these issues, many Australians had to cancel or postpone their optometrist appointments during the pandemic due to restrictions placed upon many optometrists to only offer emergent services. Of those who have had their eyes examined by an optometrist, 31% said they had needed to postpone a regular eye check as a result of the pandemic, which is a concerning outcome for Australians who may have missed the opportunity for early detection and/or preventative treatment.

The impact of increased screen time

86% experienced sore or tired eyes when using a computer or tablet Up **8%** from 2020

88% experienced sore or tired eyes when using a computer or tablet for work Up **9%** from 2020

84% experienced sore or tired eyes when using a smartphone for work Up **13%** from 2020



Section 3

The Unseen Pandemic

Myopia, or short-sightedness as it is commonly known, is an eye condition where you do not see distant objects clearly. The condition affects about 6.3 million Australians, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Myopia is a serious and growing problem across the globe, and it is estimated that by 2050, half of the world's population will have myopia, with up to one fifth of them at a significantly increased risk of blindness if current trends continue.

Research in the 2022 Vision Index supports the prevalence of myopia with most respondents (81%) experiencing difficulty seeing objects at a distance and short-sightedness being the most common diagnosis for those who have had their eyesight examined by an optometrist (40%).

The 2022 Vision Index shows that Australians have a strong understanding that too much screen time can be detrimental to their vision with 74% agreeing that too much time in front of screens isn't good for their eyesight. Despite this concern, over two-thirds (68%) of Australians report spending four hours or more every day using a device with a screen (i.e. computer, tablet, smartphone) and 56% spend more than four hours in front of a screen for work alone.

Short-sightedness is the most common issue with which Australians say they have been diagnosed

40%

of Australians who have had an eye exam have myopia

— up 3% from 2020

Australians are missing out on preventative treatment

12%

believe that their children do not suffer from vision problems - yet in fact one in five children has an undetected vision problem

51%

are not aware that lack of exposure to outdoor light can lead to myopia - when in fact this is a key preventative element

64%

are not aware of the increased risk of permanent blindness from myopia. Complications like glaucoma, cataract, myopic macular degeneration and retinal detachment are associated with high myopia and contributing to myopia becoming a leading cause of permanent blindness worldwide.

25%

never or rarely wear sunglasses in winter - when in fact the sun can be just as likely to damage our eyes in winter

Section 3 The Unseen Pandemic

Very few Australians take breaks routinely from their screens to counter the effects of eye strain, with only 11% taking a break every 20 minutes (as per the 20/20 rule - explained below). It is more common for Australians to take a break less frequently than every hour (25%, including 'never' taking a break) or 'whenever they feel like it' (36%). As such, it is unsurprising that the large majority have experienced sore or tired eyes because of their screen time – 86% of Australians have experienced sore or tired eyes due to their screen use and 78% report having experienced sore or tired eyes from using a computer or tablet during work. Sore or tired eyes from using a smartphone is also something 75% of Australians have experienced.

Australians are underinformed about the risk factors for myopia

29%

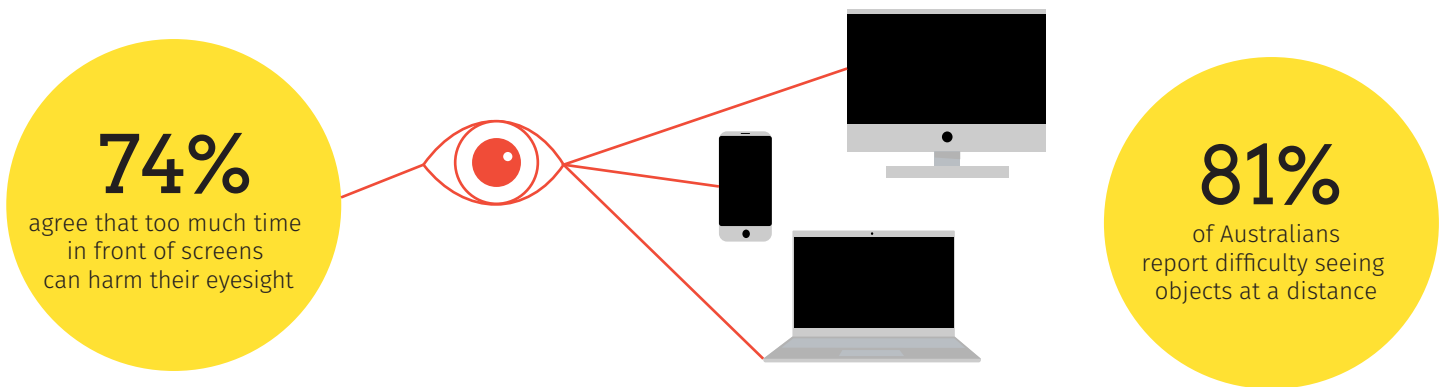
are not aware that genetics is a contributing factor – when in fact research suggests that genes are partly responsible

34%

are not aware that close-focus is a contributing factor – when in fact children who spend a lot of time focusing on near objects, such as books or screens, may have a greater chance of becoming short-sighted

51%

are not aware that exposure to outside light is a contributing factor – when in fact daily exposure to outdoor light is needed for eyes to develop properly



And yet:

68%

of Australians report spending four hours or more every day using a device with a screen, and;

56%

spend more than four hours in front of a screen for work alone.

We're also not great at taking breaks from our screens. The recommendation is every 20 minutes, look into the distance for 20 seconds. We call this the 20/20 rule. This is how often Australians take breaks:



Section 4

Little Australians

While most Australians agree that children can suffer from poor vision and that even if you are young, you should still get your eyes examined, 31% of parents said children only need an eye examination once they start showing symptoms.

This is contrary to Optometry Australia's recommendation that all children should have an eye exam before they start school. Given that one in five children has an undetected vision problem, it's crucial to be aware of any possible signs of an issue early, to give every child the best chance of reaching their full potential.

The concerning rise of childhood myopia, or short-sightedness, has had increased global attention lately, with emerging research finding a correlation between prolonged screen time – combined with a lack of outdoor time – and the rapid increase of myopia. Because myopia typically develops in children, and it has been established that treatment in the early stages can slow its progression, Optometry Australian warns it's vital that any problems are identified early.

Children and screen time:

63%

of parents were concerned about their children's screen time

64%

are concerned about the damage that screen time will have on their children's eyesight

51%

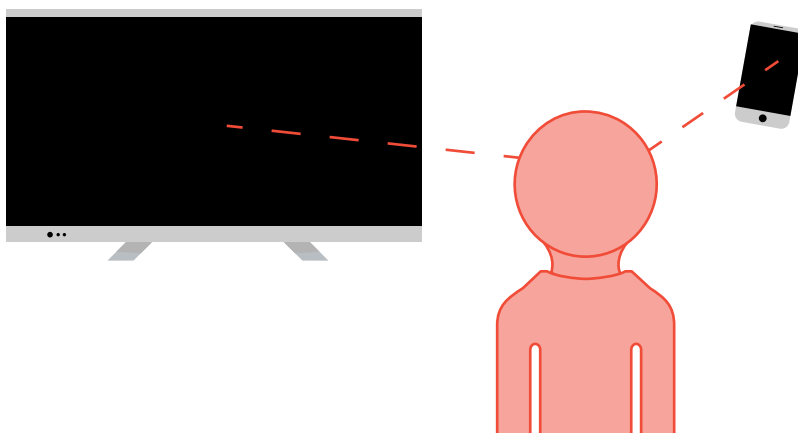
estimate their child has 4 - 8 hours of screen time per day

51%

said their children are looking at screens more in 2022 than in previous years

31%

said children only need an eye exam once they start showing symptoms

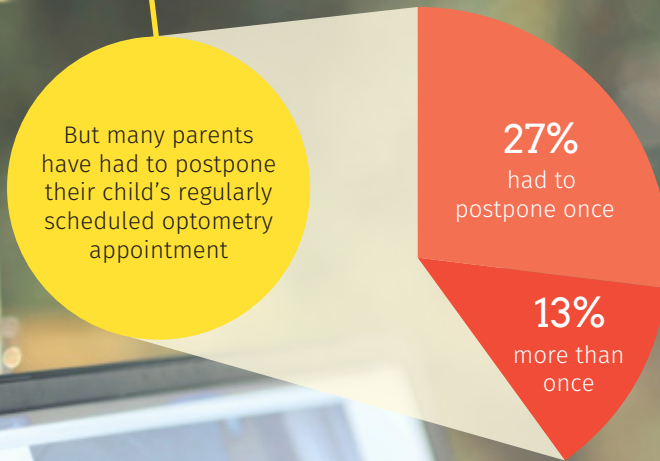
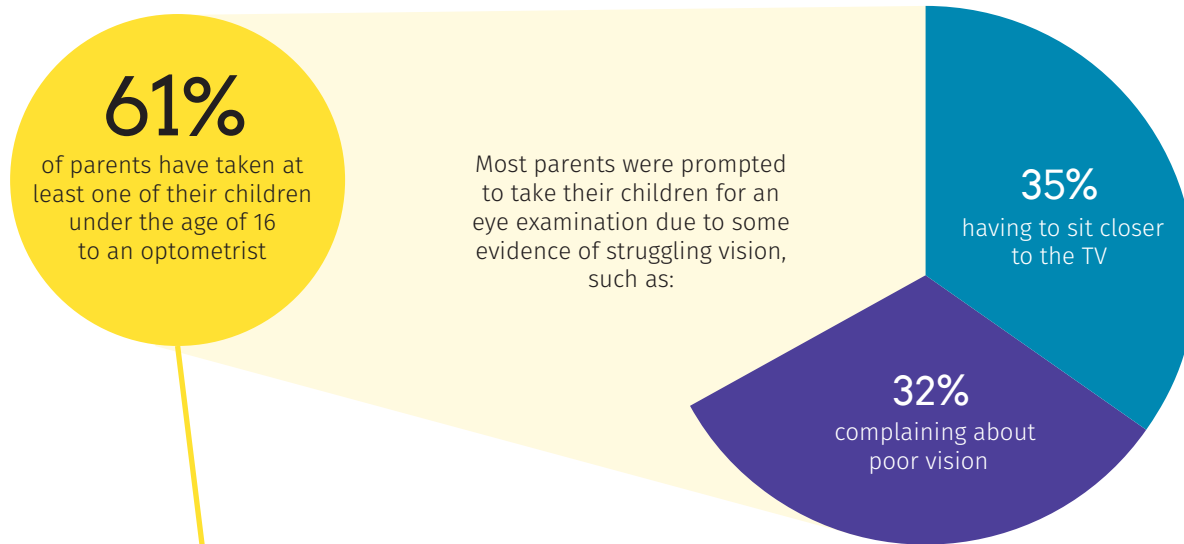


Section 4 Little Australians

The parents participating in this survey reported that, like them, their children also spent a substantial amount of time in front of screens during the pandemic, with 51% saying their children spent at least four hours in front of a screen each day. Likewise, 51% report that their children are spending more time looking at screens now than in 2020 and 2021.

Parents also reported that their children’s eye health appointments were pushed back as a result of the pandemic.

Little Australians at the optometrist:



Section 5

Other noteworthy findings

In addition to the key topics we've covered, this research report also revealed a myriad of findings relating to topics including glasses and contact lenses, sunglasses, dry eye and driving.

Some of the most noteworthy additional data include:

Glasses and contact lenses

- > Glasses are the most common method of vision correction compared with other alternatives.
- > Those who wear prescription glasses say they like their glasses' primary function, which is to help them see! Glasses wearers also like their glasses' ability to reduce eye strain while using digital devices and to make driving easier. Conversely, the main aspect that glasses wearers dislike is that their glasses fog up when they wear a face mask.
- > Reasons for preferring contact lenses to glasses are varied: to aid participation in sport, to enhance appearance, for driving or because they don't like wearing glasses.
- > Many Australians are unaware of whether or not their sunglasses are UV protective, which is a concern to Optometry Australia given the risk of UV rays doing damage to the eyes.

Australians and their attitudes to glasses and contact lenses:

66%

of Australians have worn glasses.

Glasses wearers like them because:

69%

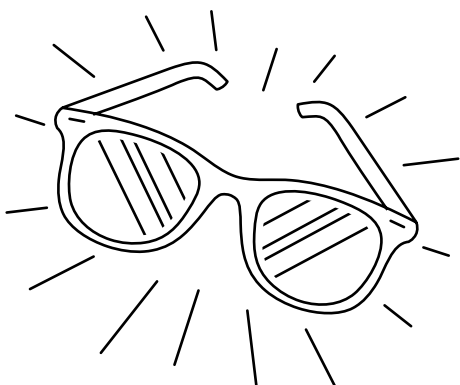
They help them see

45%

Their ability to reduce eye strain while using digital devices

44%

To make driving easier



12%

have worn prescription contact lenses.

They prefer them to wearing glasses because:

56%

They aid participation in sport

45%

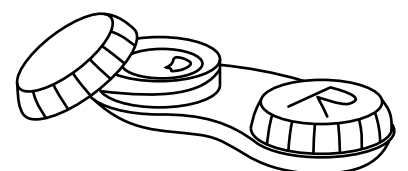
Their appearance

39%

For driving

25%

Dislike wearing glasses



Section 5 Other noteworthy findings

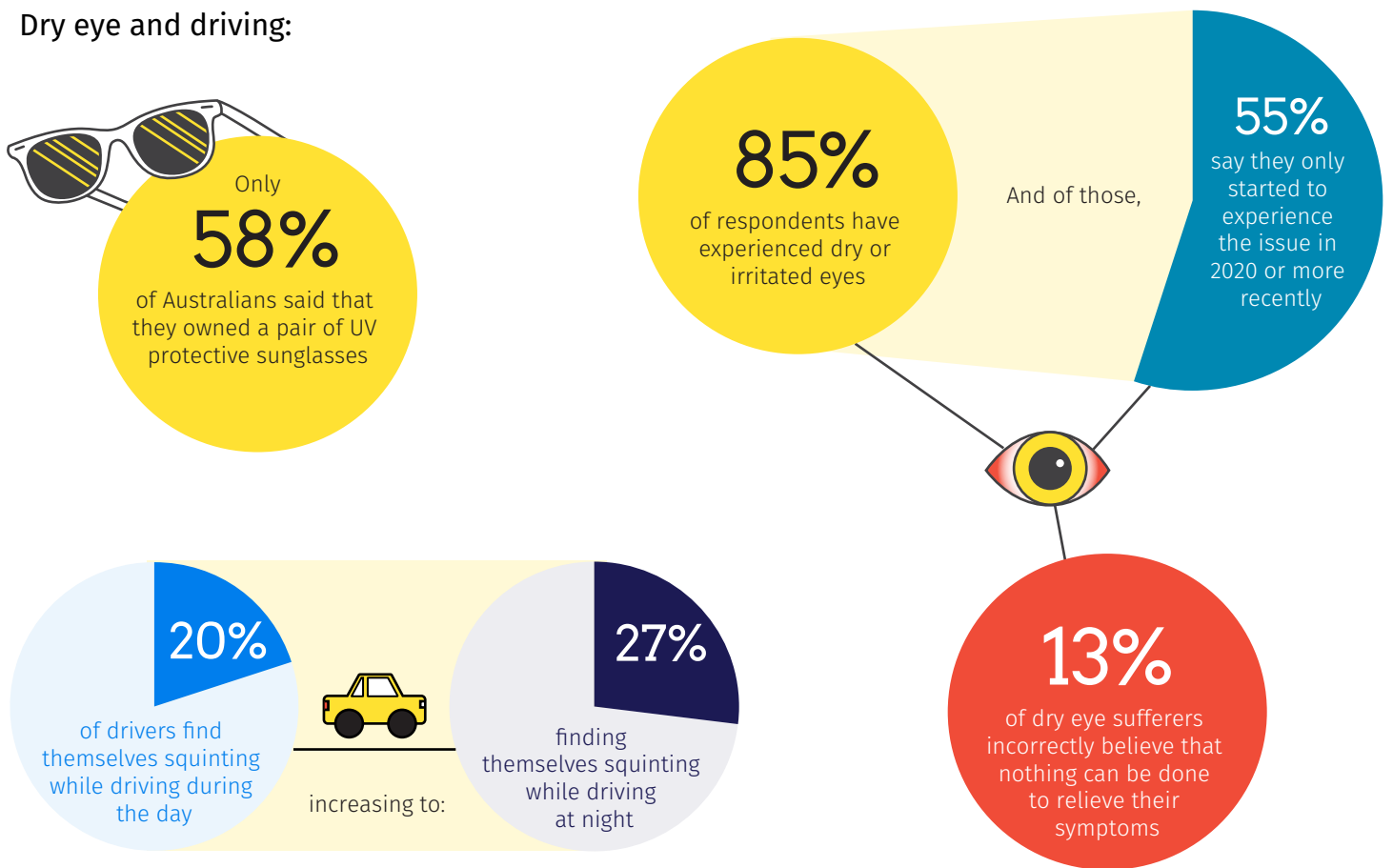
Dry eye

- > Most Australians have experienced dry, irritated or watery eyes and, of those, more than half only started to experience these issues in the last two years.
- > Many dry eye sufferers believe nothing can be done to relieve their symptoms, when in fact, the condition can be managed through treatments that increase tear production, maintain tear volume or prevent excess loss of tears.

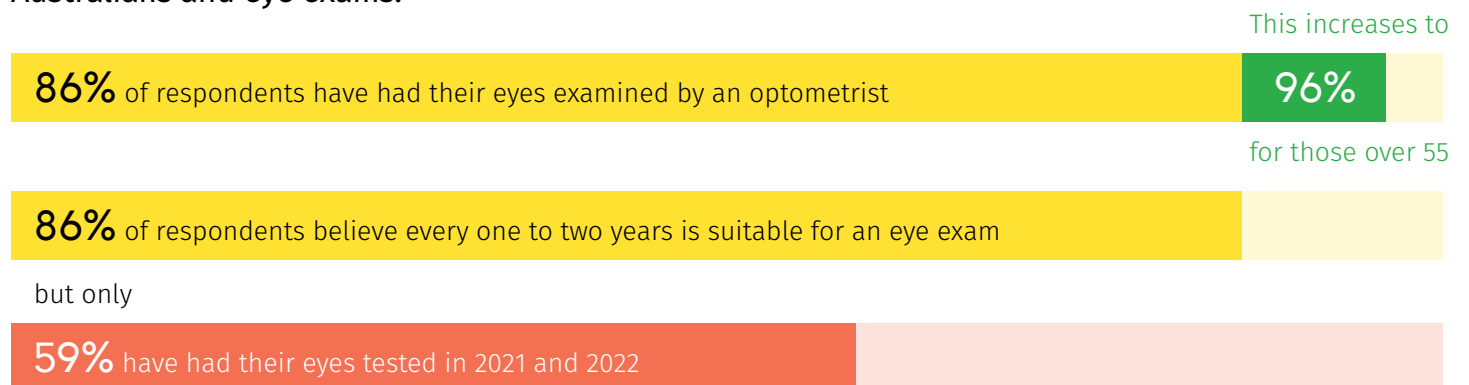
Driving

- > Also of concern to Optometry Australia were the findings that 20% of drivers find themselves squinting while driving during the day, increasing to 27% at night.

Dry eye and driving:



Australians and eye exams:



Summary

Maintaining Good Vision for Life

Vision problems and eye disease can occur at any age, which is why Optometry Australia promotes regular eye examinations with an optometrist throughout life.

Optometry Australia is encouraged by the statistic that 86% of respondents in this study have had their eyes examined by an optometrist at least once. We are equally concerned however that 13% of Australians have never had their eyes examined.

We can sometimes take our eyesight for granted until something goes wrong. As 90% of vision loss can be prevented or treated with early detection, the earlier people start looking after their eyes, the better chance of them maintaining good vision, for life.



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