

MEDIA RELEASE

COVID-19's massive impact on eye health sector

Wednesday 12 August 2020. Optometry Australia has revealed that at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in April, more than 90% of optometry practices closed or scaled back their hours of operation in response to the Australia-wide lockdown.

The peak professional body today released [the results of research](#) it conducted in late May amongst its members, who represent almost 85% of all Australian-based optometrists, on the impact of the pandemic lockdown on the profession.

Optometry Australia CEO Lyn Brodie, said that although this research provides a snapshot in time and that business has subsequently improved along with consumer demand for eye examinations, a recent poll of members around working conditions indicates that it will probably be some time yet before optometry, in general, returns to pre-COVID conditions.

“We believe that around 50% of optometrists in Australia are currently working fewer hours now than they were pre-COVID-19. It is critical that they can return to optimal working capacity as quickly as possible to support community eye health needs.

“Exacerbating our sector’s recovery, and therefore the ability to ensure quality eye care for the whole community, is the Government’s reticence to include Medicare rebates for telehealth optometry.

“We believe access to telehealth would have enabled many more practices to support patients during the height of the pandemic and likewise, could encourage more people to access the eye health care they need now.

“Consumers are increasingly embracing technology as part of their health regime and this pandemic may likely accelerate this behaviour. It is therefore important that the Government supports telehealth optometry so that we can be certain that our profession is in a strong position to meet the eye health needs of patients who are unable to access face-to-face care,” Ms Brodie said.

Optometry Australia’s [research](#) also highlights that in April, 77% of practice owners reduced their staffing levels and more than 90% of optometrists moved to some form of Government financial support with the majority of employers and employees accessing JobKeeper.

The pandemic also contributed to a 74% plummet in patient consultations in April with 192,720 consultations performed compared to 749,780 in the same month of 2019.

At the same time, 96% of practice owners and self-employed optometrists saw their revenue decrease with a quarter suffering a decline in income by 75% or more.

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Optometry Australia is the peak professional body for optometrists. Representing eight out of every 10 Australian-based optometrists, Optometry Australia's focus is to lead and advance the profession of optometry by putting eye-health front and centre of Australian health care.