

MEDIA RELEASE

US ahead of Australia in its commitment to children's eye health

Wednesday, 12 June 2019, Melbourne: Optometry Australia applauds the United States in its commitment to improving children's vision, with some states pushing for legislation to require every student entering primary school to have a comprehensive eye examination.

In the US, Missouri, Kentucky and Illinois have already mandated that children receive a comprehensive eye exam [before school entry](#) with a strong push from other states such as [Oregon](#) and New Jersey and the city of [Chicago](#) aiming to foster early detection of vision problems in children.

General Manager of Policy at Optometry Australia, Skye Cappuccio said that Australia could benefit from adopting a similar approach to that which is being rolled out across America.

"While there are school vision screening programs of some form in most Australian states and territories, we believe there is a great opportunity to introduce a coordinated national program to ensure all children entering primary school or early in their schooling journey have access to a comprehensive eye exam from an eye care professional that assesses all key aspects of their vision and eye health," she said.

"Currently screening programs offered across our states and territories differ in their thoroughness of assessment of vision and eye health, and some are offered only in some areas. Of concern, there is also evidence to suggest that children who receive screening do not always get the more comprehensive, follow-up care they need," Ms Cappuccio added.

"We believe we can do better in terms of early detection and prevention for our children by following the US's lead. We are well placed in Australia to put in place such an approach, with ready access to highly-skilled optometrists across most of the country."

Ms Cappuccio said that Optometry Australia supports the American Optometric Association (AOA) recommendation that all children should have a comprehensive eye test between 6-12 months of age and at least once between 3-5 years of age. It is generally considered that children aged 3-5 years or older give more reliable results and that earlier detection of vision problems lead to better treatment outcomes.

She said that such prevention programs would positively contribute to the impact of undetected vision problems amongst Australian children.

One in five Australian children suffers from an undetected vision problem which may impact their educational and social development. Combined with this, Australia, like much of the world, is experiencing a boom in childhood myopia – or short sightedness – which means that more children than ever are at risk of being sight poor.

Whilst myopia in children and adolescents is [growing at astonishing rates](#), with half the world's population predicted to be shortsighted by 2050, the rate of children having eye examinations remains modest.



Optometry Australia is on a mission to help reduce this via its *Good vision for life* awareness campaign, with the professional body rallying the eye health sector to declare the year 2020 as the Year of Good Vision for Life.

With 20/20 being a well-known term often attributed to perfect vision, and good vision a key factor for living a healthy, happy life, the year 2020 represents a significant opportunity to focus attention on eye health.

"And children's eye health is one of our most critical areas of focus," said Ms Cappuccio.

Find an optometrist in your area at www.goodvisionforlife.com.au

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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.