

**MEDIA RELEASE**

## **National Diabetes Week**

### **Diabetic retinopathy the leading cause of blindness in working age Australians**

**July 2021:** It's estimated an average of [one in three people living with diabetes](#) will develop some form of diabetic eye disease, with diabetic retinopathy the leading cause of blindness in working age Australians.

In light of this, Optometry Australia is urging Australians living with diabetes to prioritise their eye health this National Diabetes Week (11 – 17 July).

The national awareness day focuses attention on the escalating health impact posed by diabetes, with around 1.7 million Australians living with the disease - that's one person diagnosed every five minutes.

Of those living with diabetes, almost everyone with type 1 diabetes and more than 60% of those with type 2 diabetes will develop some form of diabetic eye disease within 20 years of their diagnosis.

Most commonly, these diagnoses will be for diabetic retinopathy. As the leading cause of blindness in working age Australians, diabetic retinopathy occurs when high sugar content in the blood damages the fine blood vessels in the retina, causing them to rupture and bleed. The retina swells and new blood vessels form, resulting in blurred or distorted vision that can lead to blindness. According to Optometry Australia's [2020 Vision Index Report](#), almost half of Australians (49 per cent) have never heard of the disease.

Optometry Australia's Chief Clinical Optometrist Luke Arundel said, "it's important to understand that diabetes itself does not lead to blindness, however it can trigger the development and onset of conditions that do impact the eyes.

"The good news is, with timely detection and treatment, 98% of vision loss from diabetes is preventable. This is why it's vital Australians living with diabetes undergo regular and comprehensive eye examinations with their local optometrist at least once a year to assess signs of potential problems."

In addition to diabetic retinopathy, other common eye related diseases experienced by individuals living with diabetes include cataracts and glaucoma.

These diabetic-related eye diseases are often asymptomatic until they reach an advanced stage, meaning once vision loss commences, the disease could be well advanced and vision loss irreversible.

The best way to manage diabetic eye related diseases is to undergo yearly eye examinations with an optometrist. It's also important Australians living with diabetes look out for sudden changes in vision including:

- Blurred vision
- Fluctuating vision
- Floaters, or dots and dark strings in your field of vision
- Impaired colour vision
- Partial or total vision loss

“With diabetic retinopathy being a progressive condition that develops over time with no early-stage symptoms, it's important for Australians living with diabetes to prioritise their eye health as part of their overall diabetes management.” added Mr. Arundel.

Optometry Australia advises all Australians visit the optometrist regularly from prior to starting school and then throughout life, while Australians living with diabetes should make this a recurring yearly examination or as advised by their optometrist.

For more information on diabetes and eye health or to locate your local optometrist visit [goodvisionforlife.com.au](http://goodvisionforlife.com.au).

- ENDS -

For further information, please contact:

**Jacob Schnackenberg | Alt/Shift**

[jacob@altshift.com.au](mailto:jacob@altshift.com.au)

0449 573 386

**About Optometry Australia:**

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