

MEDIA RELEASE

Urgent policy changes required to meet the eye health needs of socially, geographically and financially disadvantaged Australians

xx April 2022: With Federal pre-election campaigning officially underway, Optometry Australia is calling on all major parties to commit to implementing urgent policy changes to enable optometrists to better meet the needs of more patients.

The peak professional body for optometrists says that making more effective use of the highly skilled optometry workforce, could significantly improve eye care access for those in need. They are calling for investment to pilot an important collaborative care model involving optometry supporting the provision of ophthalmology-led care of patients with sight threatening age-related macular degeneration and diabetic macular oedema.

Optometry Australia President, Mr Murray Smith said, “Although these patients require regular treatment often administered by intravitreal injection, access can be difficult if ophthalmic care is not readily available due to location or cost. It is therefore understandable that there is a 20% drop out rate for intravitreal injection treatment.

“Optometry Australia is seeking Government support to establish a pilot that would allow patients to access this care through a collaboration of locally-based trained optometrists and ophthalmologists,” he said.

“Although there are over 6,000 registered and highly skilled optometrists in Australia who are well-distributed throughout metropolitan, regional and rural centres, we are not making optimal use of their skills. This is in stark contrast to similar developed nations – such as the UK, New Zealand and the United States.”

Chronic health conditions are increasing in Australia as a result of our ageing population – this includes the prevalence of eye disease. Likewise, Australians who are socially and geographically disadvantaged are more likely to suffer from significant vision loss or blindness resulting from avoidable and treatable eye disease.

The Australian Government Department of Health reports that 90% of Australians say that sight is their most valued sense and it is important that everyone has access to the eye care they need.

Mr Smith added: “Unfortunately, Australians are often prevented from accessing timely eye care due a complex eye health system stymied by policy, funding, regulation and a lack of collaboration amongst decision makers.

“This is why we’re calling for priority investment to support this important collaborative and safe care model.”

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