

MEDIA RELEASE

Children's eye examinations on the rise

Monday, 8 October 2018, Melbourne: Medicare data released for the 2017-18 financial year shows that children's optometric consultations have increased steadily over the last four years.

This is an encouraging trend, particularly as we approach World Sight Day this Thursday 11 October.

Skye Cappuccio, General Manager of Policy at Optometry Australia said this trend was pleasing and will hopefully continue.

"In Australia, approximately one in five children suffers from an undetected vision problem and it is Optometry Australia's mission to reduce this," she said.

A boom in childhood myopia – or short sightedness – is a major contributing factor with more children than ever at risk of developing poor vision through increased screen time and decreased 'green time'. And myopia, particularly in children, is growing at astonishing rates, while the rate of children having eye examinations is modest in comparison.

"It is more critical than ever that children have their eyes examined regularly to ensure any adverse vision changes are detected and treated early.

"We are therefore delighted to see an upward trend in children visiting an optometrist," Ms Cappuccio said.

Optometry Australia launched a public awareness campaign *Good vision for life* two years ago to educate people about eye health and encourage them to see an optometrist as part of a healthy regime with a strong emphasis on children's vision.

The change in per capita provision of services to 0-4 year-olds from 2014/2015 to 2017/18 is an increase of almost 500 services per 100,000 population.

"While this rate of increase is not as high as we would like it is moving in the right direction, with more children having their vision assessed and vision problems addressed," said Ms Cappuccio.

The impact of not being able to see properly cannot be underestimated. School-aged children may not be able to see their teacher, blackboards or education aids properly and their learning and confidence can suffer. Often younger children may not be aware that they are experiencing vision problems, yet if identified most can be addressed.

World Sight Day is an international day of awareness about avoidable blindness and its prevention and is an important advocacy and communications opportunity for the eye health community. Currently there are 36 million people in the world who are blind and 217 million people with moderate or severe distance vision impairment. This is tragic given that most eye disease is preventable.

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Contact:

Trinity Scarf, 0413 581 769, t.scarf@optometry.org.au

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.