

MEDIA RELEASE

Peak body applauds government support for new eye screening program

13 July, Melbourne

Optometry Australia applauds the announcement today of the Turnbull Government's pledge to provide funding for a new eye health screening program for Australians with diabetes.

Minister for Health Greg Hunt said in a media release issued today that Diabetes Australia will receive \$1 million to develop the Preserve Sight program, which will include a national electronic eye health record.

"The national electronic eye health record can be used by patients' nominated health providers, such as optometrists, ophthalmologists, GPs and diabetes health care professionals, to track eye health," Mr Hunt said.

"The program will also establish an alert system to encourage eye checks for people registered on the National Diabetes Services Scheme."

Diabetes Australia is partnering with a cohort of organisations in the eye health and diabetes sector to deliver this program, including Optometry Australia.

Optometry Australia CEO Lyn Brodie said the program's intent is to engage all optometry service providers across the nation and create stronger e-health linkages between GPs and other health care providers and optometrists.

"We are pleased to be part of this program to protect the sight of Australians with diabetes and prevent their vision loss," she said. "This will drive more patients to optometrists and help to reduce the number of Australians developing diabetes-related eye diseases."

The Centre for Eye Research Australia estimates that more than a third of people with diabetes will develop some form of diabetic eye disease in their lifetime. This means that of the current 1.7 million Australians who reportedly have the disease¹, around 567,000 are likely to have, or develop, a form of diabetic retinopathy.

"Catching this disease early through regular comprehensive eye examinations, is critical as if left untreated, diabetic retinopathy can lead to blindness," Ms Brodie said.

Over the next five years the program will alert an estimated 630,000 Australians with diabetes, who are currently missing out on recommended eye checks, Mr Hunt said.

Among the eye health organisations involved in the program is Vision 2020 Australia, Oculo, Centre for Eye Research Australia, RANZCO, and Specsavers, who will match the government's contribution of \$1 million to the program.

¹ It is estimated that about 1.7 million Australians have diabetes, with around 280 developing the disease each day. This includes all types of diagnosed diabetes including the 1.2 million known and registered as well as up to an estimated 500,000 silent, undiagnosed type 2 diabetes.



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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.