

MEDIA RELEASE AND PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

Optometrists see link between vision loss and mental health for R U OK Day

Monday, September 11, Melbourne: On R U OK Day? (Thursday September 14), Optometry Australia is encouraging Australians to understand the huge impact vision loss has on their mental health.

As our population ages, the peak professional body for optometrists sees eye health as an increasingly important part of the mental health conversation.

According to one US [study](#)ⁱ, adults with visual function loss are at least 90 per cent more likely to have depression than those without visual function loss.

CEO of Optometry Australia, Lyn Brodie, said, “[Studies](#)ⁱⁱ have shown that vision loss is among the most common chronic conditions associated with depression in old age. Around 12 million Australians have reported long-term eye conditions yet 75 per cent of all vision impairment is preventable or treatable. We encourage all Australians to see their optometrist for regular eye examinations,” she said.

Ms Brodie said, detecting age-related diseases like macular degeneration and glaucoma as early as possible was crucial in slowing the progression of the diseases and curbing the associated risk of depression.

[Studies](#)ⁱⁱⁱ have shown people with impaired vision often report that they feel unhappy, lonely, or even hopeless.

“On R U OK Day it’s important to check in with those living with vision loss,” Ms Brodie said.

“Our members understand the link between eye health and mental health, and are equipped to ask at-risk patients that important question, ‘Are you okay?’.

“People may delay seeing an optometrist, thinking nothing can be done to stop vision loss. However, as well as treating the progression of eye diseases, optometrists also offer solutions like visual aids so their patients can continue doing the things that bring them joy and purpose,” she said.

People who are depressed may not seek out eye care when experiencing visual difficulties. They also may not realise, unless asked, that they even have difficulties with their vision.

Unhealthy combo: Men are less likely to get help with their mental health and their eye health

Medicare statistics reveal that of the 8.67 million optometric services provided in 2016, women received around 57.6 per cent of those services and men, 42.4 per cent.

Men are also less likely to get the help they need for anxiety and depression, with Australian Bureau of Statistics data showing only 27 per cent of men seek professional help, compared to 40 per cent of women.

Optometry Australia looking after its members

Ms Brodie said optometrists suffered from many of the same issues that are currently affecting many streams of health professionals: depression, burnout, business and financial pressures (exacerbated by recent Medicare funding cuts and indexation freeze), isolation for rural practitioners and pressure to stay up to date in a rapidly changing profession.

A review of studies in the area found male doctors had a 26 per cent higher risk of suicide, while female doctors had a 146 per cent higher risk (more than double) than the general population. Optometry Australia lost two of its members to suicide in 2014, and sees building mental health resilience as an important part of its professional training.

The mental health of healthcare professionals will be among the many topics on the agenda when 12 promising young optometrists meet with Tim Wilson MP and Andrew Wilkie MP in Canberra this week to help raise awareness of optometry in primary health care. They will be celebrated at Vision 2020's Rising Stars in Eye Health and Vision Care cocktail function on September 12 at Parliament House.

If you or someone you know needs help with mental health, call:

- Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800
- MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467

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PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

WHAT: Photo with up to twelve young optometrists from all over Australia with R U OK placards

WHEN: Wednesday, September 13, 11:30am

WHERE: Rydges Capital Hill, 17 Canberra Ave, Forrest ACT 2603

Contact:

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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.

ⁱ Zhang X, Bullard KM, Cotch MF, et al. Association Between Depression and Functional Vision Loss in Persons 20 Years of Age or Older in the United States, NHANES 2005–2008. *JAMA ophthalmology*. 2013;131(5):573-581. doi:10.1001/jamaophthalmol.2013.2597.

ⁱⁱ Huang CQ, Dong BR, Lu ZC, Yue JR, Liu QX. Chronic diseases and risk for depression in old age: a meta-analysis of published literature. *Ageing Res Rev*. 2010 Apr;9(2):131-41. doi: 10.1016/j.arr.2009.05.005. Epub 2009 Jun 11. Review.

ⁱⁱⁱ Zhang X, Bullard KM, Cotch MF, et al. Association Between Depression and Functional Vision Loss in Persons 20 Years of Age or Older in the United States, NHANES 2005–2008. *JAMA ophthalmology*. 2013;131(5):573-581. doi:10.1001/jamaophthalmol.2013.2597.