

The importance of regular comprehensive eye examinations

Over 13 million Australians have one or more chronic (long-term) eye conditions¹.

- Across all age groups, 59% of women have a chronic eye condition compared with 51% of men¹.

Modelling from Vision 2020 Australia suggests that around 840 000 Australians are currently living with vision loss and that by 2030 this could exceed 1.04 million². In addition, we know that:

- The greatest increase in the number of Australians with vision loss is expected to be between 2020 and 2030, increasing by 39%³.
- An estimated 90% of blindness or vision loss is preventable or treatable, if detected early².

Uncorrected refractive error is the most common long term eye condition and studies show that failure to have an eye examination in the previous 2 years is associated with severe uncorrected refractive error.

- RANZCO's *[Vision for Australia's Healthcare to 2030 and Beyond](#)* makes clear that uncorrected refractive error is a risk factor if patients have not had an eye examination in the last 2 years⁴..
- Presbyopia is a refractive error that makes it difficult to see objects close up. It starts to become apparent around 40 years of age and affects individuals for a considerable part of their working life.
- The National Eye Health Survey found that the prevalence of severe uncorrected refractive error was 11 percent in non-Indigenous and 14.5 percent in Indigenous Australians⁵.
- The National Indigenous Eye Health Survey (NIEHS) found 54% of vision loss in Indigenous Australians aged 40 years and older was caused by uncorrected refractive error, but treatment coverage rates were consistently low in all surveyed communities⁶.

It is estimated that by 2050, 50% of the world's population will have **myopia**, including 20 million Australians⁷.

- Myopia is often first identified in the early teenage years but may also develop from the early 20s onwards.
- Early detection and management of myopia has been shown to slow down progression.
- Whilst higher levels of myopia confer the greatest risk for associated ocular pathology, even low levels of myopia pose an increased risk of glaucoma, cataract, retinal detachment and myopic maculopathy.
- Children's vision screening programs are primarily developed to detect children with amblyopia (lazy eye) and are not designed to detect children at risk of myopia development.

Macular disease is the leading cause of blindness and severe vision loss in Australia with an estimated 1.9 million Australians having evidence of macular disease. Aged Related Macular Degeneration is the most common macular disease, affecting 1 in 7 Australians aged over 50 years⁸.

- In its early and intermediate stages, Age Related Macular Degeneration may have no symptoms. Early detection is crucial to save sight, making it critical to have regular comprehensive eye examinations.
- The Macular Disease Foundation of Australia recommends that if you are 50 years or older you should have an eye health and vision exam, including a check of your macula, every two years.

In Australia, a 1.7 million people have diabetes. Over time, virtually all people with Type 1 and 60% of people with Type 2 diabetes are affected by **diabetic retinopathy**, which can cause blindness if left untreated⁹. In its earlier stages, diabetic retinopathy is asymptomatic, emphasising the importance of a timely diagnosis⁹.

- Diabetes Australia recommends that people living with diabetes should have a comprehensive eye examination at least once a year.
- Current guidelines recommend that people with diabetes should have their eyes examined every 1-2 years, and annually for Indigenous Australians.
- We also recognise the importance of ensuring timely, affordable, accessible and culturally safe care for First Nations peoples, noting that the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with diabetes or pre-diabetes is nearly four times higher than non-Indigenous Australians. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples with diabetes are also approximately three times more likely to experience diabetes-related vision impairment than non-Indigenous Australians living with diabetes¹⁰.

It is estimated that over 300,000 Australians have **glaucoma**, yet 50% of these are unaware they have it, thinking they have healthy eyes. Glaucoma, which can cause vision loss or blindness in the end-stages of the disease, develops slowly and often without symptoms. Early detection followed by treatment is crucial to prevent vision loss.

- Glaucoma Australia recommends all Australians 50 years or older visit an optometrist every 2 years for a comprehensive eye examination¹¹. If you have a family history of glaucoma or are of Asian or African descent, it is recommended you get your eyes checked every 2 years from the age of 40 (or ten years earlier than the age of diagnosis of a family member with glaucoma)¹¹.
- Vision 2020's National Eye Health Survey (NEHS) found that only 52.4% of non-Indigenous Australians and 28.0% of Indigenous Australians with glaucoma self-reported a known history of glaucoma – meaning that many people with glaucoma don't realise that they have it¹².

Cataract is the second leading cause of reversible vision loss in Australia but approximately two-thirds of people are unaware of their cataracts.

- Patients examined more than five years ago are 29 times more likely to be unaware of their cataracts and at particularly high risk of vision loss¹³
- Although cataracts typically occur later in life, one in seven people develop cataracts before the age of 60¹³.

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