



MEDIA RELEASE

Wake up, Canberra! Ignoring eye health is costing Australians their sight

20 March 2025: Optometry Australia is intensifying its election campaign following underwhelming responses from key political parties, warning that Australia is sleepwalking into an eye health crisis.

This urgent call to action coincides with **World Optometry Week** (17-23 March 2025), which this year carries the theme 'Eyes to the Future: Optometry Improving Global Wellness'. As the world highlights the critical role of optometry in shaping healthier communities, Australia must rise to the occasion or risk falling behind – especially as eye health continues to be deprioritised in national policy discussions.

Over 400 optometrists across the country have sent more than 5,500 emails to federal representatives, urging them to reverse the 2014 Budget decision that reduced Medicare-subsidised initial comprehensive eye examinations for under 65s from once every two years to once every three years.

Yet, despite this strong advocacy, political leaders have failed to take action:

- The Australian Labor Party (ALP) has referred optometrists to the Medicare Services Advisory Committee (MSAC) rather than committing to fixing the issue, leaving change languishing in bureaucracy. [\[Read Minister Butler's response here\]](#).
- The Australian Greens have offered only a general commitment to Medicare, but with a focus on dental rather than eye care.
- The Coalition has yet to respond at all.

"This lack of action is unacceptable," said Skye Cappuccio, Chief Executive Officer at Optometry Australia. "If we saw a similar decline in preventative health measures like cancer screenings, the government would act immediately. Instead, eye health is being ignored—and Australians are paying the price."

A System in Crisis: The Numbers Speak for Themselves

Optometry Australia's analysis of official Medicare figures found that per capita rates of initial comprehensive eye examinations by people aged under 65 fell by nearly 20% between 2017-18 and 2023-24. This alarming drop was in all age cohorts from 0-5 years to 55-64 years, and in all jurisdictions. In fact, in one year, between 2022-23 and 2023-24, there was a 6.2% drop,



indicating a likely link to cost-of-living pressures, with per capita rates of initial comprehensive eye examinations now lower than in the heights of the COVID pandemic in 2020-21.

At the same time, chronic eye conditions—including childhood myopia, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and macular degeneration—are rising sharply. Many of these conditions can lead to permanent vision loss if not detected early, yet routine eye exams remain out of reach for too many Australians.

Real Lives at Risk: The Impact of Delayed Eye Care

For patients like [Jarryd](#), a young father diagnosed with glaucoma, or [Emily](#), a 21-year-old student with asymptomatic intracranial hypertension, routine eye exams meant the difference between early treatment and potential blindness.

“If I hadn’t gone in for a routine eye check, I would never have known,” said Jarryd. “The optometrist picked up something I had no symptoms for—if I had waited, I might have lost my vision. Medicare-subsidised eye exams allow[ed] me to receive that care, and they should be scheduled according to the best evidence.”

With neither major party taking real action, Optometry Australia is no longer advocating quietly behind the scenes.

“Our members are stepping up, meeting MPs, sharing patient stories, and demanding action,” said Ms Cappuccio. “If optometry is ignored this election, it won’t be because we stayed quiet.

“At the moment, the major parties are on a unity ticket to ignore eye care. This has to change – Canberra may be happy to ignore eye health, but Australians shouldn’t.”

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Optometry Australia is the peak professional body for optometrists. Representing 86% of all registered 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.