

3 April 2025

Senator The Hon Anne Ruston
Shadow Minister for Health and Aged Care
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Senator.Ruston@aph.gov.au

Cc: Richard Temperly, richard.temperly@aph.gov.au; CCHQ Questionnaires, questionnaires@cchq.org.au

Dear Senator Ruston

Thank you for the response to Optometry Australia's correspondence seeking a written election commitment that a Coalition Government will urgently address the alarming drop in the number of Australians aged under 65 who are receiving initial comprehensive eye examinations.

Optometrists are very concerned about the impact that the near 20% per capita drop in initial comprehensive eye examinations for under 65s is having on eye health. It is occurring at the same time as the prevalence of a range of chronic ocular conditions such as childhood myopia, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and age related macular degeneration is increasing. These and other eye conditions are treatable if detected on a timely basis, but are often asymptomatic, emphasising the importance of regular comprehensive eye examinations.

The drop off in comprehensive eye examinations for under 65s is occurring in all age cohorts from 0-5 to 55-64 years, and in all jurisdictions. It is over 4% higher for women than men. In the year to June 2024, there was a 6.2% drop, presumably due to cost-of-living pressures.

Optometry Australia appreciates the Coalition's recognition of the importance of eye health and commitment to continue to assess the appropriateness of the frequency of eye examinations if elected to Government. As Shadow Minister, you have rightly emphasised the criticality of preventive health and there is no more important example of preventive health than Australians getting their eye examined by their optometrist in accordance with clinical guidance.

The Coalition's response refers to its record on eye health in Government. It is important to note that it was the Coalition that changed the frequency of Medicare subsidised initial comprehensive eye examinations for under 65s from once every two years to once every three years in the 2014 Federal Budget. No clear rationale or evidence was given for this savings measure at the time which Optometry Australia opposed because of its impact on the timely detection of asymptomatic ocular conditions.

The response also refers to the MBS Review of Optometry commissioned by the Coalition Government specifically investigating changing the frequency for comprehensive eye exams and ultimately determining that the current policy settings were appropriate. While accurate, it is important to note the Optometry Clinical Committee of the Taskforce recommended that people aged 50-64 should receive comprehensive eye examinations every two years after Optometry Australia provided the Taskforce with a comprehensive review of the available evidence. Importantly, since the Taskforce reported in late 2020, per capita rates of comprehensive eye examinations have dropped appreciably and are now lower than they were in the heart of COVID.

Optometry Australia is currently undertaking the work required to enable an MSAC assessment at the earliest opportunity of a return to two yearly Medicare subsidised initial comprehensive eye examinations for under 65s. However, we are very cognisant of the length of time that it can take to progress through an MSAC assessment and Budget decision-making process. Should the Coalition be in Government, we will be advocating to ensure that this important matter is accorded the high priority that it deserves.

We look forward to continuing to work with you in delivering better eye care for Australians.

Warm regards,



Skye Cappuccio
Chief Executive Officer
Optometry Australia