



# Priorities to ensure a **sustainable vision for eye care**

# Introduction

In the lead up to the next federal election, Optometry Australia is calling on the next Government to support our vision for a sustainable and effective eye care system accessible to all Australians.

We are asking politicians to support optometrists' mission to meet the changing needs of our population by embracing a rapidly advancing clinical, technological and communication landscape.

This is important as more than 12 million Australians report a long-term eye condition – which combined with an ageing population and an increasing prevalence of chronic disease – makes the need for timely and affordable access to primary eye care vital for all Australians.

Optometrists play a crucial role in reducing the heavy social and economic cost of avoidable blindness and vision loss, and preventing or slowing the development of ocular and systemic conditions that reduce productivity and require costly specialist care.



# A sustainable vision for eye care

## Priority 1: Ensure the relevant recommendations of the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Review are implemented

Since the commencement of the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) review in 2015, Optometry Australia has continued to push for amendments to modernise the Optometric Benefits Schedule.

In February 2019, the Medicare Benefits Scheme (MBS) Review Taskforce released recommendations by the Optometry Services Clinical Committee (OSCC). Optometry Australia is calling on the next Government to ensure the forthcoming relevant recommendations of the MBS Review are accepted and implemented in a timely manner.

The recommendation to reinstate two yearly rebates for initial comprehensive examinations for middle-aged Australians is a high priority. Evidence-based Australian and international guidelines recognise this as best practice and fundamental to preventing and minimising vision loss. Vision loss associated with eye conditions particularly common to middle-age, such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and macular degeneration – is often undetected during the period when intervention is most effective.

## Priority 2: Reassess scheduled fees for MBS optometry items so primary eye care services are sustainable and accessible

In addition to the MBS review underway, there is a need to reassess the scheduled fees for all MBS optometry items to help ensure primary eye care services are provided in a sustainable and readily accessible way for the community.

Scheduled fees fall well below the true cost of providing clinical eye care in a sustainable way. With the combination of a lengthy freeze on indexation and an unprecedented 5% reduction to all optometry rebates in 2015, patient rebates for optometry items on the MBS are five per cent less today than in 2012.



Yet the cost of providing quality primary eye care has continued to rise. Practitioners increasingly report concern about the sustainability of clinical care provision – particularly to disadvantaged communities and patients requiring support for chronic conditions.

## Priority 3: Increase awareness of the importance of comprehensive eye examinations for all in early childhood

There is strong evidence supporting the need for all children to access a comprehensive eye examination to support early identification of primarily correctable or manageable eye problems, before they progress and before they adversely impact the child's education. Yet there has been little real improvement in access to optometric care by pre-school children over the last decades.

We can do better.

Optometry Australia calls on the next Government to leverage opportunities when communicating with families of pre-school children to increase awareness of the importance of accessing a comprehensive eye examination with an optometrist in early childhood. Importantly, families can access this needed care at no, or minimal, cost given the need for such examinations is recognised and supported under the MBS.

#### **Priority 4: Support rapid advancements in primary eye care to be adopted to shape an optimal future for community eye health**

Change in the primary eye care sector is occurring at an unprecedented, and somewhat unique, rate. Optometry 2040, an innovative project to identify a plausible and preferred future for community eye health and primary eye care, has set out a pathway to achieve a preferred future that capitalises on rapid advancements.

Embracing the opportunities implicit in rapidly developing clinical and communication technologies, will enable optometrists to collaborate with patients to support them through their eye care journey, that may include initial AI-enabled assessments in the comfort of their own home, virtual consultations and digital health monitoring via wearable technology. If appropriately channelled these opportunities could support better access for disadvantaged communities, and great efficiencies in eye care across the board.

To ensure technologies and other sector changes are embraced in a way that optimises benefit to the community, and avoids potential futures of diminishing access and care quality, optometry practices will rapidly need to adopt new cross-discipline models of care and new funding and business strategies.

We are calling for the next Government to partner with us to support the adoption of positive new models for primary eye care by investing \$1.5 million as a one-off contribution to applied research.

#### **About us**

Optometry Australia is the national peak professional body for optometry, and represents more than 80 per cent of optometrists registered to practise in Australia. Since 1918 we have united the sector to make Australia a world leader in vision and eye health services and patient care, and we continue to lead the profession of optometry, optometrists and community eye health.

As the principal providers of primary eye health and vision care, optometrists play a key role in preventative care, early detection and treatment of eye and vision problems, and detection and referral of systemic conditions that affect the eye such as diabetes.

In 2018, Optometry Australia celebrated its 100th anniversary as the peak professional body for optometrists by launching findings of our Optometry 2040 project. As a long-term transformational agenda, Optometry 2040 provides a model for major health system reform, setting out the actions to realise a future where optometry embraces key trends to support ready access to quality, comprehensive, and well-integrated eye care.