



Media Release

Thursday, 14 October 2021

Half a million missed eye tests put Australians' sight at risk

Analysis of the latest Medicare data shows the COVID-19 pandemic has had a big impact on eye health care.

Between 1 March 2020 and 31 August 2021, there were 516,906 less eye tests conducted nationally than in the previous 18-month period.

This means that there are more than half a million Australians at greater risk of developing an eye condition or losing sight than before the pandemic.

Thursday 14 October is **World Sight Day**, and Vision 2020 Australia is calling on all Australians to take the pledge to love their eyes in 2021.

With around 90% of blindness and vision impairment preventable or treatable if detected early enough, now is the perfect time for you to show your eyes some love, even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We're asking all Australians to take the pledge to love their eyes, and:

1. Have an eye test as soon as you can.
2. Don't ignore changes in your vision.
3. Maintain your ongoing treatment if you have an existing eye condition.

Optometrists nationally are permitted to provide urgent care even during the lockdown so don't delay seeking treatment if you notice a change in your vision.

Quotes attributable to Vision 2020 Australia CEO Patricia Sparrow:

"Almost half a million Australians missed having an eye test over the past year and a half as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Around 90% of vision loss is preventable or treatable if it's identified early, and eye tests are the early warning system which could save your sight.

"This World Sight Day we're asking all Australians to love their eyes by pledging take three simple steps:

"Have an eye test as soon as you can, don't ignore changes in your vision and maintain your ongoing treatment if you have an existing eye condition.

"Optometrists in all states are permitted to provide urgent care, so people should not delay seeking treatment if they notice a change in their vision.

"An eye test is a simple, quick and effective way to love your eyes and protect your vision."

ENDS

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Vision 2020 Australia is the national peak body for the eye health and vision care sector, representing around 50 member organisations involved in local and global eye health and vision care, health promotion, low vision support, vision rehabilitation, eye research, professional assistance and community support. vision2020australia.org.au

Key tips for looking after eye health:

- Make sure you have a regular eye test, especially if you are over 40
- Wear a hat and sunglasses when outside
- Wear eye protection when playing sports like squash, or performing hazardous
- Quit smoking and maintain a healthy diet with regular exercise
- Manage your diabetes (bloods glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol levels) and ensure you have regular eye tests

Facts about blindness and vision loss in Australia

- More than 453,000 Australians are blind or vision impaired. and estimates suggest that if current trends continue, these numbers will almost double by 2030.
- Approximately 90% of vision loss and blindness is preventable or treatable and can be attributed to five main conditions: refractive error (needing glasses), diabetic retinopathy, macular degeneration, cataract and glaucoma.
- The risk of developing an eye condition increases as people enter their forties, while people who smoke, have diabetes, have a family history of eye disease are also at increased risk of eye disease.
- Diabetes is a leading cause of avoidable vision loss, but currently only half of people living with diabetes get the recommended eye tests. The KeepSight program (www.keepsight.org.au) is helping making it easier for people living with diabetes to get the eye care they need.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are three times more likely to be blind or vision impaired than non-Indigenous Australians. While there have been significant improvements in eye care for these communities over the past 20 years, more needs to be done to end avoidable blindness. [Strong Eyes, Strong Communities](#) sets out a 5-year plan to achieve this.

About World Sight Day

Established by the World Health Organisation in 2000, World Sight Day is an annual day of awareness to focus global attention on blindness and vision impairment, and is held on the second Thursday in October each year.