A National Framework for children's vision screening

Australian Government endorsement of a National Framework for children's vision screening to ensure all children have their eyes screened prior to starting school

Eye disorders are one of the most common long-term health problems experienced by Australian children[1]. If left untreated, they can lead to vision loss or blindness, having a lasting impact throughout childhood and adult life[2].

Eighty-percent of a child's learning occurs visually[3]. If an eye condition goes undetected, it can have significant long-term effects on a child's sensory, cognitive, social and language development[4].

Children with vision impairment have poorer educational outcomes, are less likely to attend school and more likely to face social exclusion and violence in the school environment[5].

Vision loss has life-long implications, in a study completed in 2016, Deloitte Access Economics found that a 17-year old living in Australia with a vision impairment received $53,916 less in earnings than a person with clear vision.

Good vision is therefore integral to childhood development, learning and success later in life. Making it essential that conditions compromising children's vision are identified and treated early to minimise long-term impacts.

Children's vision screening programs in Australia[6] have demonstrated great return on investment and have been highly successful in decreasing blindness in children[7], outweighing associated health care costs[8].

However, there is no consistent, evidence-based approach to screening children's vision, resulting in different approaches in each jurisdiction and variations in outcomes.

Vision 2020 Australia members recommend the development of a national evidence-based framework for the early identification and management of vision and eye health problems in 3.5 to 5 year-old children.

Adopting a National Framework will provide a cost-effective and robust approach to children's vision screening in Australia that will deliver benefits to future generations, helping detect vision disorders and prevent life-long vision loss in Australian children.

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[1] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2008), *Eye Health among Australian children*, accessed 16 August 2021.

[2] https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/98252212-cc46-477d-a0f3-adcefe01cd25/ehaac.pdf.aspx?inline=true

[3] MacCuspie, P. A. "Implications of visual impairment for social interaction." PA MacCuspie, Promoting acceptance of children with disabilities: From tolerance to inclusion. Halifax, Nova Scotia: APSEA (1996): 29-49.

[4] American Optometric Association, "Comprehensive pediatric eye and vision examination" (Accessed 3/10/10) http://aoa.uberflip.com/i/807465-cpg-pediatric-eye-and-vision-examination/9?m4=

[5] Burton, M J., et al. The Lancet Global Health Commission on Global Eye Health: vision beyond 2020, The Lancet, published online February 16, 2021.

[6] Integrated Care Strategy (2018), *Evaluation of the Statewide Eyesight Preschooler Program (StEPS) Final Report*, New South Wales Government, accessed 16 August 2021

[7] Incremental cost effectiveness ratio of $13,942 per QALY gained.

[8] Integrated Care Strategy (2018), *Evaluation of the Statewide Eyesight Preschooler Program (StEPS) Final Report*, New South Wales Government, accessed 16 August 2021