Increase public access to sight saving eye care treatment



Fund ophthalmology staff specialist positions in the public system and develop new and innovative eye health workforce strategies that improve access to cataract surgery and intravitreal injections in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Cataract and macular diseases (such as age-related retinopathy and diabetic eye disease) are two of the leading causes of vision loss in Australia[1]. Fortunately, there are proven, cost effective treatments that can reverse or slow the loss of vision.

However, people who rely on the public health system currently experience significant barriers in accessing these treatments with:

- 74,000 people (of which 8,500 are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples) currently waiting for cataract surgery, and
- Few public health services providing ongoing, monthly intravitreal injections.

To prevent a lifetime of avoidable blindness Australian's need timely access to these services.

Timely access is good for the individual and for the economy, with interventions to improve or restore sight returning $4 for every $1 invested[2].

To address the barriers in accessing these treatments and ensure equity in sight saving treatment, Vision 2020 Australia recommends:

- Implementing a 90-day rule for cataract surgery, whereby patients are to be seen within 90 days of requesting an outpatient visit for assessment and operated on within 90 days of booking - and reporting of performance against this.
- An increase in publicly funded and/or affordable access to intravitreal injection[3] and benchmarks implemented that measure reach and timeliness. For this to be successful, mandated improvements are needed to the collection and reporting of outpatient/specialist clinic data. This would provide greater clarity on the expediency of initial appointments and treatment and ongoing access to sight saving treatment.

To achieve this, fund ophthalmology staff specialist positions in the public system and develop new and innovative eye health workforce strategies that improve public access to cataract surgery and intravitreal injections in regional, rural and remote Australia.

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SETTING AUSTRALIA'S SIGHTS

[1] Cataract causes bilateral vision impairment in 20% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 40 years and over and 14% of other Australians aged 50 years and older.
[2] The Fred Hollows Foundation by PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia, Investing in Vision: Comparing the costs and benefits of eliminating avoidable blindness and visual Impairment, February 2013
[3] In alignment with the Australia Governments National Strategic Action Plan for Macular Disease A better view - National Strategic Action Plan for Macular Disease (health.gov.au)