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Save your sight: TV campaign urges Victorians to get eyes tested

Vision 2020 Australia launches television campaign featuring John Clarke and Bryan Dawe, urging Victorians over 40 to get eyes tested and prevent avoidable blindness

Following the success of the Australian Government's National Eye Health Awareness Campaign, Vision 2020 Australia CEO Jennifer Gersbeck today launched an advertising campaign aimed at Victorian audiences, with the message that it is vital for those over 40 to get their eyes tested.

"Around 500,000 Australians are affected by vision impairment or blindness and this number is expected to double over the next 15 years unless people are pro-active about saving their sight."

"Blindness is avoidable for many people if early treatment is sought. The key is to have your eyes tested regularly to detect potential problems, especially if you have diabetes, a family history of eye disease or are over 40 years of age," Ms Gersbeck said.

"Vision loss is a critical issue for Australia, because people are living longer," she said. Research shows that blindness and vision loss increases threefold with each decade of age.

"The good news is that 75 per cent of eye conditions are preventable or treatable. This means that for most people, blindness or vision impairment can be avoided or greatly reduced in severity."

Vision 2020 Australia has been raising community awareness of the importance of Australians over 40 getting their eyes tested regularly under their Vision Initiative program, a partnership of eye health and vision care organisations funded by the Victorian Government.

"It is hoped that other state and territory governments will adopt a Vision Initiative program to raise awareness of these important eye health and vision care messages across Australia so that avoidable blindness can be eliminated by 2020" said Ms Gersbeck.

The 30 second television commercial will air to metropolitan and regional Victorian audiences from Sunday 21 June for a two week period.

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For more information please contact Emma Martin at Mendleson Communication by email emma@mendleson.com.au or phone 03 9827 0422.

FACT SHEET

More than 80 per cent of vision loss in Australia is caused by five conditions:

- **Age-related macular degeneration (AMD)** - a leading cause of blindness. Nearly one person in four who lives into their nineties will eventually lose vision from this condition.
- **Cataract** - the most common of all elective surgery procedures and the eye condition responsible for the largest single direct health cost. However, cataract surgery is one of the most cost effective operations.
- **Diabetic Eye Disease** - almost all vision loss caused by this condition can be prevented by timely treatment.
- **Glaucoma** - early diagnosis and treatment are important to control glaucoma and protect sight. Half of those with glaucoma are undiagnosed and untreated.
- **Refractive Error** - over half of the people who present with visual impairment could have their vision improved with the correct glasses.

Visual loss is a major factor in general ill-health and preventing independent ageing. It:

- doubles the risk of falls
- triples the risk of depression
- increases the risk of hip fractures by four to eight times
- increases admission to nursing homes three years early
- doubles social dependence.

The direct health costs of treating eye disease are enormous - \$1.8 billion in 2004. In Australia over the past decade, the cost of eye disorders has doubled.

The direct costs for vision disorders are more than the cost of coronary heart disease, stroke, arthritis or depression. The indirect costs of visual impairment, which are almost twice the direct health costs, add another \$3.2 billion to the annual bill for visual impairment.