

Eye health and vision care factsheet

National prevalence

Almost 575,000 Australians aged over 40 have vision loss and 66,500 of these people are blind, with the largest proportion aged over 70 (nearly 70 per cent).

- The prevalence of vision loss trebles with each decade over the age of 40.
- With a rapidly ageing population, it is estimated that by the year 2020, close to 1 million Australians will be vision impaired, including 100,000 blind if action is not taken.
- Five conditions (uncorrected refractive error, cataract, age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy) cause 80 per cent of vision loss in Australians aged 40 or over.ⁱ

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The situation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is markedly more concerning.

- Blindness rates in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are six times the rate than for the broader population.
- Four conditions cause 94 per cent of vision loss—refractive error, cataract, diabetic eye disease and trachoma—each is readily amenable to treatment. However, one-third of Indigenous adults have never had even a basic eye exam and for those with diabetes only 20 per cent get the annual eye exam that they need.
- Vision loss accounts for 11 per cent of the health gap.ⁱⁱ

If investment does not increase, 34,000 Indigenous Australians will suffer low vision or blindness in the next 10 years. Full implementation of The Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision could save 32,000 of these.ⁱⁱⁱ

Ensuring people who are blind or vision impaired remain independent and participating in their community

In comparison to the general population, people who are blind or vision impaired suffer twice as many falls, have three times the risk of depression, are admitted to residential care three years earlier and often lose confidence to independently manage everyday life.^{iv}

People who are blind or vision impaired seeking a job are four times more likely to be unemployed compared to the general population.^v

Equal access to services and supports

According to the recent Snapshot of Blindness and Low Vision Services in Australia:^{vi}

- Some 27 per cent of organisations reported that they have had to refuse service to clients and over 50 per cent reported that service wait times had increased.
- Blindness and low vision services are continuing to rely largely on the generosity and support of the community, with volunteering contributing 17,820 hours per week (equivalent to one-third of the paid workforce hours).

- The greatest proportion of funding for the blindness and low vision sector at 43 per cent (\$81 million) is derived by fundraising and bequests with income from all government sources amounting to 30 per cent (\$56 million).

Economic cost of blindness and vision impairment

The total economic cost of vision loss in Australia is estimated to be \$16.6 billion in 2009 or \$28,905 per person with vision loss aged over 40.^{vii}

The indirect financial costs of vision loss are almost at 1.5 times the direct health costs, totalling \$4.2 billion to the community in 2009 with:^{viii}

- lost earnings for people who are blind or have vision loss are estimated to cost the economy almost \$2.3 billion in 2009
- the cost of carers, including their lost earnings, is estimated at \$251 million
- aids, equipment, home modifications and other indirect costs are estimated as \$839 million
- 75 per cent of vision loss is preventable or treatable. Meaning that millions of dollars could be saved annually if avoidable vision loss was prevented.

Research has shown that interventions to improve eye health in developing countries are among the most cost-effective public health programs available returning \$4 for every \$1 invested.^{ix}

Eye health in our region

Globally around 223.4 million people are blind or vision impaired.^x

It is estimated that in the developing world 80 per cent of all blindness and vision impairment is avoidable or treatable.^{xi}

Two out of every three people in the world who are blind are women. In the developing world women of all ages are more frequently exposed to causative factors such as infectious diseases and malnutrition and are much less likely than men to use eye health and vision care services.^{xii}

The Vision 2020 Global Initiative

Since the VISION 2020 Global Initiative was launched in 1999, blindness prevalence has significantly decreased in the Indo-Pacific region, with:^{xiii}

- a 38.5 per cent reduction from 1.3 per cent to 0.8 per cent in the Pacific
- a 43 per cent reduction from 1.4 per cent to 0.8 per cent in Southeast Asia.

These reductions are remarkable given there has been a 23 per cent increase in our population across the region.^{xiv}

The Vision 2020 Australia Global Consortium

The Vision 2020 Australia Global Consortium designed and implemented joint programs across the Indo-Pacific Region. Global Consortium programs have resulted in:

- over 840,000 people screened for eye health conditions
- over 440,000 eye health treatments provided
- over 17,500 training events held for eye health workers and stakeholders.

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- ⁱ Vision 2020 Australia by Access Economics Pty Limited, Clear Focus: The Economic Impact of Vision Loss in Australia in 2009, June 2010.
- ⁱⁱ Taylor HR, National Indigenous Eye Health Survey Team, National Indigenous Eye Health Survey: Minum Barreng (Tracking Eyes), Melbourne: Indigenous Eye Health Unit, The University of Melbourne, 2009.
- ⁱⁱⁱ The University of Melbourne Indigenous Eye Health Unit by PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia, The Value of Indigenous Sight: An Economic Analysis, September 2015.
- ^{iv} Vision 2020 Australia by Access Economics Pty Limited, Clear Focus: The Economic Impact of Vision Loss in Australia in 2009, June 2010.
- ^v Research and Measures Team Vision Australia, Employment Research Survey Report, International and Stakeholder Relations Department, May 2012.
- ^{vi} B. Ah Tong, G. Duff, G. Mullen and M. O'Neill, August 2015, A Snapshot of Blindness and Low Vision Services in Australia, Vision 2020 Australia, National Disability Services, Australian Blindness Forum, Sydney.
- ^{vii} Vision 2020 Australia by Access Economics Pty Limited, Clear Focus: The Economic Impact of Vision Loss in Australia in 2009, June 2010.
- ^{viii} Ibid.
- ^{ix} The Fred Hollows Foundation by PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia, Investing in Vision: Comparing the costs and benefits of eliminating avoidable blindness and visual Impairment, February 2013.
- ^x World Health Organisation, The Global Burden of Disease Study 2012
- ^{xi} World Health Organisation, The Global Burden of Disease Study 2012
- ^{xii} i. Abou-Gareeb I, s. Lewallen, k. Bassett, p. Courtright, Gender and blindness: A meta-analysis of population-based prevalence surveys, *Ophthalmic Epidemiology*, 8. P.39-56, 2001.
- ^{xiii} J.B. Jonas, R. George, R. Asokan, S. R Flaxman, J. Keeffe, J. Leasher, K. Naidoo, K. Pesudovs, H. Price, L. Vijaya, R.A White, T. Y Wong, S. Resnikoff, h.R Taylor, R.A Bourne, on behalf of the Vision Loss Expert Group of the Global Burden of Disease Study, Prevalence and causes of vision loss in Southeast Asia and Oceania: 1990-2010, *Journal of Ophthalmology*, Vol 98(5), p.586-91, Jan 2014.
- ^{xiv} Ibid.