

# Sector submission to the National Consultation on the Roadmap and Implementation Plan for the MRFF Dementia, Ageing and Aged Care Mission, April 2021

The mission will invest \$185 million over 10 years under the MRFF to improve outcomes for people living with dementia and older Australians. The mission will support older people to maintain their health and quality of life as they age, live independently for longer and access quality care when they need it.

## Questions -

### 1. What is your name?

Judith Abbott

### 2. What is your email address?

policy@vision2020australia.org.au

### 3. What is your organisation?

Vision 2020 Australia

### 4. Residential state or territory

Victoria

### 5. Are these priority areas for investment identified in the Implementation Plan the most effective way for delivering on the Missions goals and aims? (300 words)

Vision 2020 Australia suggests a rebalancing of the Mission to allow for a greater focus on sensory contributions to healthy ageing, their relationship to dementia and associated health systems research to enhance prevention and management.

The Lancet Global Health Commission<sup>1</sup> has described the connection between dementia, vision loss and other health issues impacting on older people. Local research is required to measure the extent of the impact on the Australian population.

Vision impairment is a prominent health issue within the population of older Australians with some 96% estimated to have sight problems by the age of 75.2 While many common causes of vision loss can be managed with spectacle correction, cataract surgery and early diagnosis and treatment of diseases, there are substantial inequities in access. A report on the prevalence of eye disease in residential aged care facilities found 78% had eye diseases requiring ongoing management, 25% had low vision and 4% were legally blind<sup>3</sup>. Better identification, management and treatment of

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<sup>1</sup> The Lancet Global Health Commission, Vol 9, Issue 4, April 01, 2021

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth of Australia. (2005). National framework for action to promote eye health and prevent avoidable blindness and vision loss. Retrieved from <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/eyehealth-pubs-frame>

<sup>3</sup> Macular Disease Foundation Australia, Vision and Eye Healthcare Study in residential aged care facilities, 2018

vision loss is critical to the quality of life of older Australians - keeping them healthy, engaged and independent for longer. Training is also required to ensure that those living with low vision have the support necessary to manage their impairment (e.g. manipulating and inserting contact lenses).

Ensuring that this Mission actively supports health systems research that can address this age related challenge is critical. Research that focuses on multiple impacts of ageing and enhances system integration should be prioritised<sup>4</sup>.

## **6. Are there existing research activities which could be utilised to contribute to the Dementia, Ageing and Aged Care Mission Roadmap and/or Implementation Plan aims and priority areas for investment. How can these be leveraged? (200 words)**

Yes.

The second National Eye Health Survey (NEHS) which has been funded by the Australian Department of Health and will provide data on the prevalence and causes of vision impairment, blindness and eye disease in non-Indigenous Australians aged 50 years and over and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 40 years and over.

International research such as the Lancet Commission on Global Eye Health's report, *Vision beyond 2020* which analysed vision and eye health research undertaken in the last 20 years. Through this, they identified sixteen priority challenges in global eye health which require further focused research, including:

- Research to improve specific services and treatment for age related diseases such as cataract, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.
- Health systems and policy research to strengthen the integration between primary and secondary levels of care, and between eye care and other health services.

Three priority challenges identified in the *Vision Beyond 2020* report also highlighted the need to research strategies to improve treatment access for vulnerable patients. This was also highlighted in the Australian Government Department of Health's National Strategic Action Plan for Macular Disease<sup>5</sup>.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of blindness in Australia<sup>6</sup> and there is growing evidence of epidemiological, molecular and clinical links between Alzheimer's disease and AMD<sup>7</sup>. Focus on this research is required given the increasing prevalence of both conditions in the old Australian population.

## **7. Are the 'Evaluation approach and measures' appropriate for assessing and monitoring progress towards the mission's goal and aims? (200 words)**

Yes.

Vision 2020 Australia supports the multi-component, mixed-methods approach for monitoring and evaluating progress towards the mission's goals and aims.

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<sup>4</sup> In areas such as dementia or sensory loss, for example, such research might bring together elements spanning primary care, digital health, consumer driven approaches and comparative effectiveness. Prioritising such work would provide a much-needed focus on systemic responses to health challenges.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Government Department of Health (2019). *A better view – National Strategic Action Plan for Macular Disease*.

<sup>6</sup> Deloitte Access Economics and Macular Degeneration Foundation (2011). *Eyes on the future - A clear outlook on age-related macular degeneration*.

<sup>7</sup> Biscetti et al (2017). Associations of Alzheimer's disease with macular degeneration. *Frontiers in bioscience (Elite edition)*.