



Media release

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Study reveals dangerous lack of awareness about the symptoms of Macular Degeneration

Research into Australia's leading cause of blindness, Macular Degeneration, has found that 40 percent of individuals with the more severe form of the disease accessed treatment too late¹, reducing their chances of effective treatment.

In 57 per cent of these cases the delay was a result of being unaware of the symptoms or unknowingly linking the symptoms to something else.

With one in seven people over the age of 50 at risk of developing Macular Degeneration², Optometrists Association Australia is urging people to have their eyes examined regularly and to be aware of the symptoms of MD.

Optometrists Association Australia President, Ian Bluntish says ignorance is a big risk factor.

"Macular Degeneration can lead to blindness but early detection increases treatment options, helping sufferers maintain quality of life," says Mr Bluntish.

"Many people link deteriorating vision with aging, but for the greater majority of people poor vision in older age is unnecessary," he says.

Some of the common symptoms of Macular Degeneration include:

- Dark patches or empty spaces in your vision
- Difficulty in reading or doing activities which require fine vision
- The distortion of straight lines becoming wavy or bent
- Difficulty in distinguishing anything in your central vision.

Tips to reduce the risk of developing MD

- Quit smoking
- Exercise regularly
- Eat a well balanced diet with fish, dark green leafy vegetables and nuts
- Protect your eyes from UV damage.

The more severe 'wet' form of Macular Degeneration can result in sudden vision loss and is caused by abnormal blood vessels growing into the retina.

Regular eye examinations are the key to the better the prospects for treatment.

During Macular Degeneration Week, from 5 to 11 June, Optometrists will be participating with GPs, Pharmacists, Podiatrists and Ophthalmologists to raise awareness of Macular Degeneration.

¹ Macular Degeneration Foundation study (1,944 members of the Foundation who suffer MD were surveyed over an eight month period from August 2004). The results were compiled in November 2005.

² *Clear Insight*, The Economic Impact and Cost of Vision Loss in Australia; Eye Research Australia, Access Economics, June 2005, p12.



For further information or to arrange an interview with an expert Optometrist please contact Robert Hilkes on 03 9663 6833 or 0413 338 144.

Background information

About Optometrists

Optometrists are trained to diagnose, manage, and treat a wide range of visual and ocular health-related concerns, including: prescribing spectacles and contact lenses, diagnosing, managing and treating eye diseases and treating minor eye injuries.

Optometrists Association Australia (OAA) is the professional association for Australian optometrists. OAA has approximately 3,400 members, which represents over 95 per cent of optometrists in Australia.

Facts about vision and optometry

- Over 480,000 Australians are visually impaired in both eyes.
- Over half of visual impairment in Australia is due to refractive error and is easily corrected.
- Macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness and severe vision impairment in Australia.
- Optometrists perform 75 per cent of primary eye care in Australia.
- 2,789 optometrists actively practise optometry in Australia.
- Optometrists provide 4.79 million Medicare services a year.
- 96 per cent of optometric services are bulk-billed.
- The total cost of vision disorders in Australia was estimated to be \$9.85 billion in 2004.
- Optometrists examine approximately 20 per cent of the population every year.
- One in four children has a vision problem and two thirds of these problems go undetected.
- Eye injuries cost Australia over \$155 million a year. Over 90 per cent of eye injuries could be prevented if correct eye protection is worn.
- 150,000 Australians who have glaucoma have not been diagnosed.

The Optometrists Association Australia recommends that everyone should have their eyes tested every two years unless otherwise advised by their optometrist.

Visit the OAA website www.optometrists.asn.au to search for an optometrist in your area or for more information and advice about eye conditions.

The OAA can provide comment on a range of issues including: Government involvement in eye care, Medicare, products related to vision care, general eye health.