

Make eye checks a priority for diabetes

The Macular Disease Foundation Australia and Diabetes Australia are calling on all Australians living with diabetes and health professionals to make eye checks a priority. This follows the release of the report, *Out of sight – A report into diabetic eye disease in Australia*.

The Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute and Centre for Eye Research Australia report shows almost everyone with type 1 diabetes and more than 60 per cent of those with type 2 diabetes will develop some form of diabetes-related eye disease within 20 years of diagnosis.

Julie Heraghty CEO of Macular Disease Foundation Australia said, “Diabetes-related eye disease is the leading cause of blindness and serious vision loss in working aged Australians. People with diabetes are often unaware that they have retinopathy and the disease may progress to advanced stages without any noticeable effects on vision”.

“It is essential that people with diabetes have regular eye examinations so we can detect changes early and so that treatment can be delivered before irreversible vision loss occurs” she said. “If any changes in vision occur such as dark areas, blurred, distorted, dim or double vision or difficulty seeing at night, people should see their GP or specialist immediately,” said Heraghty.

Professor Greg Johnson, CEO Diabetes Australia said, “There are over 1.5 million Australians currently with diabetes and the majority are at risk of eye damage. Currently, up to 50 per cent of Australians with diabetes do not have their eyes checked at the recommended frequency of every 2 years or more frequently when at higher risk.”

“Regular eye examinations are vital for timely intervention” he said “and we need a national program with clear targets and measurement to ensure that every person with diabetes has their eyes checked as recommended to help prevent retinopathy, macular damage and blindness”.

“It is also essential that our community and the health system takes diabetes more seriously and we ensure optimal management of blood glucose levels through the best treatments and enhanced self-management support programs,” said Prof Johnson.

Heraghty said “There is clearly a significant need for Australians to be more aware of diabetes-related eye disease, and the importance of regular eye checks to ensure early detection, diagnosis, early intervention and/or treatment. In almost all cases, this will help prevent vision loss.”

Investing in eye health research is essential for saving sight and eventually finding cures for diseases like macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy.”.

Research into knowledge and attitude to blindness in Australia found that it is second only to cancer among the medical conditions that people fear most.¹

ENDS

Issued on behalf of the Macular Disease Foundation Australia by Porter Novelli.

Media contacts:

Lydia Meakin: (02) 8987 2112 / 0450 242 131 / lmeakin@porternovelli.com.au
Lauren Neave: (02) 8987 2123 / 0425 259 885 / lneave@porternovelli.com.au

About the Macular Disease Foundation Australia

The Macular Disease Foundation Australia is a national charity that provides information, guidance and support for those living with macular disease. The Foundation is committed to reducing the incidence and impact of macular disease in Australia through education, awareness, research, support services and representation. For further information phone the free call number 1800 111 709 or visit www.mdfoundation.com.au

About Diabetes Australia

Diabetes Australia is the national body for people affected by all types of diabetes and those at risk. Diabetes Australia works in partnership with consumers, health professionals and researchers to reduce the impact of diabetes.

For more information visit www.diabetesaustralia.com.au or phone 1300 136 588 .

ⁱ Eyes on the future - A clear outlook on age-related macular degeneration. Report by Deloitte Access Economics & Macular Degeneration Foundation, 2011.