

New sight saving resources for Australia's Residential Aged Care Facilities

A report and new digital training tools have been launched today to improve understanding of eye health and vision loss in Australia's residential aged care facilities.

The resources have been developed by the Macular Disease Foundation Australia (MDFA) – Australia's peak national body representing the macular disease community – after it conducted a comprehensive study, which found high rates of eye disease, often under-diagnosed and untreated, in residential aged care facilities.

Macular disease is the leading cause of legal blindness and vision loss in Australia. Aged-related macular degeneration (AMD), the most common form of macular disease, is a chronic progressive disease with a prevalence about 50 times that of multiple sclerosis and four times that of dementia. One in seven Australians over the age of 50, or about 1.29 million people, have some evidence of AMD.

There is no cure: preventative measures around diet and lifestyle can reduce risk and slow progression of AMD. Highly effective treatment is available for the late stage wet form of AMD to stabilise and maintain best vision.

The MDFA's *Vision and Eye Healthcare Study in Residential Aged Care Facilities* report found an urgent need for reform of vision care within the residential aged care system.

MDFA CEO Dee Hopkins said more than 70% of residents who took part in the study had some form of eye disease; almost 30% had untreated cataracts and more than 60% had some degree of AMD.

"Vision loss in residents of aged care facilities can have so many negative consequences, such as increased risk of falls and fractures and a reduction in social independence and quality of life. Vision loss also trebles the risk of depression," Ms Hopkins said.

"It's important to note that the eight residential aged care facilities who took part in the study were very keen to participate in a project aimed at improving the quality of life for residents.

"But there's a knowledge gap, and that's why the MDFA has developed these practical educational resources focused on common eye disease, behavioural signs that may indicate loss of vision, where to go for more information and how to embed detection and treatment in aged care practices. Guidelines have been developed for management and healthcare professionals, as well information for families and guardians. There's also an easy-to-follow training video for care workers," Ms Hopkins said.

Ciarán Foley, CEO of Allambie Heights Village Ltd, which participated in the study, said information that allowed staff to recognise the importance of early detection, diagnosis and treatment will benefit residents immensely and positively impact their independence and quality of life.

While not mandatory, it's hoped that residential aged care facilities will incorporate the MDFA digital resources into their management systems and staff training programs. The resource packs and full report will be distributed to thousands of residential aged care facilities across the country this week and are available for free download from the MDFA website.

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