



 #howsyourmacula

Australian of the Year and Macular Disease Foundation fighting for older Australians

Macular Degeneration Awareness Week 26 May – 1 June 2013

Older Australians have the powerful voice of Ita Buttrose, Australian of the Year 2013 and Patron of the Macular Disease Foundation Australia, fighting for their interests this Macular Degeneration Awareness Week.

Ita Buttrose said, “The day I was honoured with Australian of the Year I made a public commitment to raise awareness of issues relating to older Australians, including macular degeneration.

“We need a new way of thinking about older people and how we care for them. During Macular Degeneration Awareness Week, I want the health of older Australians to be a priority for both the community and government.

“It’s a two-way street. Older Australians need to take care of their health and not take it for granted and the government needs to look after this important group and treat them with the dignity they deserve,” said Ms Buttrose.

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness in Australia primarily affecting older Australians and causing over 50% of blindness and severe vision loss.

“Many older people would be surprised to know the importance of their diet and lifestyle in reducing the risk and progression of the disease including eating an eye-friendly diet and leading a healthy lifestyle,” Ms Buttrose said.

“I want to encourage older Australians to make eyes their health priority.

“At the same time the government needs to give equitable support to Australians over 65 years who have vision impairment from macular degeneration,” Ms Buttrose said.

Macular Disease Foundation Australia CEO, Julie Heraghty said, “If you acquire a disability, such as legal blindness from macular degeneration after the age of 65 years, you are presently excluded from the support of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). You will access and co-pay for services through the aged care sector, which is not designed to cater for relevant services such as low vision aids.”

Ita Buttrose said, “It is just unacceptable for any government to discriminate about the care a person receives because of their age. On one side of 65 a person is eligible for care under the NDIS and receives life-time funded support; on the other side of 65 a person becomes the responsibility of the aged care sector with very limited support. It is confusing and worrying to older people to experience this kind of discrimination. Older Australians living with a disability, such as vision loss from macular degeneration, deserve better.”

ENDS

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

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About the Macular Disease Foundation Australia

The Macular Disease Foundation Australia (formerly the Macular Degeneration Foundation) is the national charity committed to reducing the incidence and impact of macular disease in Australia.

In January 2013 the Macular Degeneration Foundation changed its name to the Macular Disease Foundation Australia to champion all macular diseases primarily macular degeneration, along with diabetic retinopathy, retinal vein occlusion and macular dystrophies.

For further information on macular degeneration, phone the free call number 1800 111 709 or visit www.md.foundation.com.au.

About Macular Degeneration

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness and vision loss in Australia. All Australians over the age of 50 years should have an eye test and make sure their macula is checked. The macula is the central part of the retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye. The macula processes all central visual images and is responsible for a person's ability to drive, see colours clearly, read and recognise faces. Macular degeneration causes damage to the macula, resulting in central vision loss.

Background notes:

The symptoms of macular degeneration can include one or more of the following:

- Difficulty with reading or any other activity with fine vision
- Distortion where straight lines appear wavy or bent
- Distinguishing faces becomes a problem
- Dark patches or empty spaces appear in the centre of your vision

More than one million people in Australia have some evidence of macular degeneration and in the absence of effective prevention and treatment measures, this number will increase to more than 1.7 million by 2030, creating an even greater burden on Australia's health, disability and aged care systems.ⁱ

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