

The Hon Tony Abbott MP
Leader of the Opposition
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Abbott,

RE: Sight for Seniors campaign

I write to you in support of the Macular Disease Foundation Australia's Sight for Seniors campaign. I ask that you consider the needs of older Australians and support the three objectives of the campaign:

1. No age discrimination for over 65s in the NDIS

People who acquire a disability over the age of 65 should not be excluded from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)*. Currently if you acquire a disability, such as blindness from macular degeneration after the age of 65 years, you are excluded from the support of the NDIS and expected to be catered for in the aged care system. For people who have late macular degeneration and experience serious vision impairment or blindness, virtually all are aged over 65. The aged care system lacks the funding, capacity and expertise to deliver much needed services such as low vision aids and technologies, even under the present aged care reform.

2. A fair deal on aids and technology for people with low vision

There needs to be an appropriate, accessible and equitable national subsidy scheme for people with vision impairment or blindness to access low vision aids and technology. Currently, where you live in Australia determines how well you read. For example, for people needing a simple magnifier every state has a different scheme, a different subsidy (if any at all), and a different delivery system. In contrast, for a concession card holder requiring a hearing aid the Federal Government provides a uniform, accessible and simple system across the country. There is a real need to provide low vision aids and technology in the same way. The provision of low vision aids and technologies is low cost for the Government, yet yields high return for people with vision impairment or blindness in terms of improving their quality of life and independence.

3. Funding to better support the Foundation's work in macular degeneration

The Federal Government needs to allocate appropriate funding for the Macular Disease Foundation Australia for its work in providing innovative research grants, an information Helpline, national education sessions and patient support services. Over one million Australians have some evidence of macular degeneration. Its prevalence is four times that of dementia and more than half that of diabetes. Over 50% of all blindness is due to the disease, making it the leading cause of blindness in Australia.

Full name: _____
Address: _____
Suburb: _____ State: _____ Postcode: _____
Telephone: (0____) _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

* The official name of the NDIS is DisabilityCare Australia.