

Together we can make a difference!

Before the last Federal election, the MD Foundation asked you to support our efforts to gain equity of access to and affordability for low vision aids and technology.

I now write to thank you for your support, inform you of recent progress and to again ask for your help on another critical matter - the renewal of the MD Foundation's four year Federal funding agreement which supports our National Education Program.

Low Vision Aids and Technology campaign – update

As a result of your letters to Local Federal MPs prior to the 2007 Federal election the now Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, gave a commitment to consider developing a national aids and equipment strategy.

I have recently been advised by the Hon Bill Shorten MP (Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services) that key decisions by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Disability Ministers have now been undertaken which put this pre-election commitment into motion.

Mr Shorten wrote "the audit on low vision aids that the MD Foundation provided will be used as part of the aids and equipment reform process. I envisage that negotiations (with States) would encompass ... a review of access criteria, equity of access and cost."

This outcome is a result of your action. It is an exciting and welcome response from the Federal Government. The Foundation will continue to pursue this issue on your behalf.

Federal Government funding

In May 2006, in response to concerted efforts by the Foundation and patient advocacy, the Federal Government announced a four year grant to the MD Foundation. This enabled the Foundation to act as a truly national organisation and for the first time deliver an Australia-wide Education and Awareness program. Over 190 education sessions have been held with more than 8,000 attendees. This funding ceases on the 30 June 2009.

It is essential that this funding is renewed for the next four years for the work of the Foundation to carry on; to continue to save sight and reduce the incidence and impact of MD in this country.

What can you do to help?

Let the Prime Minister know that this funding must continue! Enclosed is a pro-forma letter. Please sign, address and date and send to:

The Prime Minister of Australia
The Hon Kevin Rudd
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Your family and friends can also support the Foundation by writing or emailing. They can visit the MD Foundation website at www.mdfoundation.com.au to download a pro-forma letter.

Thank you for your vital assistance!

Julie Heraghty, Chief Executive Officer

MD Foundation ... on the road again

Our educators are on the road again, giving you the opportunity to attend an education session on MD; to ask questions; and to be updated on the latest in treatment, nutrition and low vision aids and technology.

It is important to attend your local education session and bring along family and friends. It is especially important for family members to attend if you have MD, as there is a *50% chance of developing MD* if someone in your family has the disease.

To RSVP please call the Foundation on 1800 111 709.

Education schedule – March to May

LOCATION	DATE	TIME
NSW Penrith	Tues, 10 March	10am to 12noon
NSW Katoomba	Tues, 10 March	2pm to 4pm
NSW Wollongong	Thurs, 12 March	10am to 12noon
NSW Nowra	Thurs, 12 March	2pm to 4pm
NSW Bowral	Mon, 16 March	10am to 12noon
NSW Goulburn	Mon, 16 March	2pm to 4pm
NSW Mona Vale	Tues, 17 March	2pm to 4pm
VIC Geelong	Tues, 24 March	2pm to 4pm
VIC Frankston	Wed, 25 March	2pm to 4pm
VIC Moreland	Thurs, 26 March	10am to 12pm
VIC Broadmeadows	Thurs, 26 March	2pm to 4pm
NSW Orange	Mon, 30 March	10.30am to 12.30pm
NSW Woy Woy	Mon, 6 April	10am to 12noon
NSW Wyong	Mon, 6 April	2pm to 4pm
NSW Maitland	Tues, 7 April	10am to 12noon
NSW Cessnock	Tues, 7 April	2pm to 4pm
NSW Cabramatta (Vietnamese)	Wed, 29 April	10am to 12noon
NSW Ballina	Wed, 6 May	10am to 12noon
NSW Lismore	Wed, 6 May	2pm to 4pm
NSW Coffs Harbour	Thur, 7 May	10am to 12noon
NSW Nambucca Heads	Thur, 7 May	2pm to 4pm
NSW Port Macquarie	Fri, 8 May	10am to 12noon

Vision Van begins second Australian Tour

Following the success of the Vision Van last year, the MD Foundation will again partner with Novartis, OAA and RANZCO for a second Vision Van tour.

The tour will run 30 March to 26 June 2009 through the eastern states of Australia. Education sessions will be held in some locations prior to the Vision Van's arrival.

The 2008 Vision Van tour tested over 950 people, 116 of which showed signs of MD.



MD Foundation CEO Julie Heraghty and Jo Thomas at the Vision Van in WA

Living well with MD

Let's go bowling

The Australian Blind Bowlers Association is a national sporting group introducing blind and vision impaired people to bowls. Contact 03 9312 2622 for information in your area or visit: www.blindbowls.org.au.

Let's go to the theatre

The 2009 Perth International Arts Festival is staging two plays with audio description. *War of the Roses* starring Cate Blanchett on Sunday 8 March at 1pm and 7pm at His Majesty's Theatre and *Antigone* on Saturday 7 March at 2pm at Subiaco Arts Centre Theatre.

The audio description service is available over headphones with a narrator describing the on-stage action. You need to advise when you book the ticket. To book call (08) 6488 5555 or visit www.perthfestival.com.au.

Join a support group

When faced with health issues, talking to people who are facing similar challenges can often be beneficial. Sharing stories and ideas can also help focus on the positives and provide new ways of approaching difficulties.

Support groups offer a chance to share experiences in a caring environment. Please contact us to add your group to our website listing.

Researchers study depression in AMD patients

Researchers at the Farber Institute for Neurosciences at Thomas Jefferson University in the US have been awarded a \$3.7 million grant from The National Eye Institute to study depression in patients diagnosed with Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD).

Dr Barry Rovner and Dr Robin Casten will lead the study of 200 AMD patients. The study will test a combined treatment to prevent depression and disability associated with AMD. It will test the effectiveness of low vision rehabilitation and a psychological intervention program designed to treat/prevent depression in patients diagnosed with AMD. The intention is to help maintain independence and participation in activities.

"Vision loss in the elderly is a major risk factor for depression" said Dr Rovner.

"We want to find ways to improve the vision skills of people with AMD and thereby prevent depression."



About depression

Depression is more than just a low mood; it is a serious illness. People with depression can find daily functioning difficult and there can be serious effects on physical and mental health. Depression however is treatable and effective treatments are available.

If you, or someone you care about, could be experiencing depression talk to your local doctor. Fact sheets, information and referral advice on depression are available from beyondblue on 1300 224 636 or visit their website: www.beyondblue.org.au. You can also contact Lifeline on 13 11 44 for support.

TO THE VICTORIAN COMMUNITY

Our thoughts are with you during this very difficult and traumatic time.

The MD Foundation

YOUR DETAILS PLEASE!

We are updating our mailing list and service provisions.

We would greatly appreciate you completing the enclosed form entitled 'Your details please' and returning it in the reply paid envelope. Thank you!

Keep on Driving

NSW Minister for Roads, The Hon Michael Daley, launched our *Keep On Driving* project in January. An MD brochure was inserted into every driver licence renewal notice sent during the next five years – at a rate of one million insertions each year. This is a massive awareness initiative!

The launch was a leading item on Channel 9 news and our thanks go to Jean and Des Morton who kindly agreed to be interviewed. Jean and Des are now renowned movie stars according to Des' golf buddies. We thank them for being such wonderful supporters.

How can you help the MD Foundation?

Thank you for supporting the Foundation. We rely on your generosity of donations, bequests and sponsorship to service the MD community across Australia.

A donation slip and reply paid envelope is included for your convenience if you are able to help us at this time.

You can also make a donation online using your credit card. This secure method allows you to make a donation at any time.

And remember - all donations over \$2 are tax deductible. We thank all our wonderful supporters for their ongoing support.

Questions for your eye care professional

It is important to speak to your eye care professional about your MD so you fully understand how it may impact you.

The MD Foundation has a fact sheet available with key questions to ask your and tips to ensure you leave with the best possible understanding of the disease.

If you would like a copy call the Foundation on 1800 111 709 or visit the website: www.mdfoundation.com.au and click on *Fact Sheets and Publications*.

DID YOU KNOW?

Our *Project Vision 2* research told us that while 83% of those with MD are aware of the Amsler Grid, only 60% were using the symptom detection tool.

Use an Amsler Grid to test for changes. Do not ignore the symptoms as early detection can save sight!

Lucentis in public hospitals

The Foundation is continuing to gather cases about the lack of access to Lucentis through the public health system.

If you have had trouble accessing Lucentis in a public hospital please contact the Foundation on 1800 111 709.

Contact us

Suite 302, Level 3, 447 Kent Street SYDNEY NSW 2000

Helpline 1800 111 709 **Tel** 02 9261 8900 **Email** info@mdfoundation.com.au

Website www.mdfoundation.com.au

DISCLAIMER: This newsletter is produced by the Macular Degeneration Foundation Australia.

It is intended as a newsletter and its contents do not constitute medical advice and should not be relied on as such.