



13 October 2016

## National Eye Health Survey and Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD)

A National Eye Health Survey<sup>1</sup> of 4,836 individuals from metropolitan, regional and remote communities has identified that the prevalence of blindness and vision impairment in Australia has declined, and that Australia is performing better than other comparable countries.

However, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) still remains the leading cause of blindness in Australia, according to a report released today by the Centre for Eye Research Australia (CERA) and Vision 2020 Australia. This is primarily due to our ageing population.

Speaking of the report, Macular Disease Foundation Australia Chief Executive Officer, Julie Heraghty said, "It's not surprising that blindness caused by AMD is declining. This can be reasonably explained by a number of interconnected factors which have been key drivers for early detection, rapid treatment and quality ongoing care."

"Australia's outstanding results are due to a unique combination of high disease awareness, leading to earlier diagnosis and treatment, and access to excellent eye health pathways, ensuring Australians receive a high standard of care from a skilled workforce in optometry and ophthalmology.

Other recent research shows that Australia achieves significantly better long-term treatment outcomes for AMD compared to Europe or the United States. This has enabled so many older Australians with the disease to avoid blindness, continue to have quality of life and to read and drive<sup>2</sup>."

Importantly, successive Federal governments have provided timely, affordable access to safe and effective registered sight-saving treatments through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and Medicare. Without these actions, the number of people living with blindness would be much greater.

"Although the national survey showed that overall 52% of participants did not know what was causing their vision impairment, in the case of AMD the story was very different with only 17% not knowing the cause of their vision impairment," said Ms Heraghty. "This highlights the enormous work undertaken to raise awareness of AMD in Australia where we now lead the world, and the importance of ongoing health awareness campaigns such as those undertaken by Macular Disease Foundation Australia.

"The work to build awareness of macular degeneration has resulted in 86% of people over 50 in the 'at risk' group having had a macula check in the last two years (up from 33% in 2007 and 69% in 2014).<sup>3</sup>

"Given our ageing population and despite our excellent record in early detection, awareness and treatment outcomes, there is still more to be done.

"We need to continue our education and awareness campaigns to improve outcomes for people at risk of major vision loss from macular degeneration and other potentially blinding diseases such as diabetic retinopathy. Importantly, we must increase our investment in research to enable us to continue the quest for the ultimate answer to this disease – a cure."

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<sup>1</sup> National Eye Health Survey 2016 - Centre for Eye Research Australia and Vision 2020

<sup>2</sup> Gillies M et al, Ophthalmology 2015;122:1837

<sup>3</sup> Consumer survey conducted by Galaxy Research, 18-20 March. N= 549 Australians aged 50 plus. Survey developed in conjunction with the Macular Disease Foundation Australia.



### **About Macular Disease Foundation Australia**

Macular Disease Foundation Australia's vision is to reduce the incidence and impact of macular disease in Australia through education, awareness, research, support services and representation.

The Foundation is a national charity providing information, guidance and support for those living with macular disease, primarily macular degeneration, which is responsible for fifty percent of all vision loss and blindness in Australia. It is the voice of the macular disease community. For more information about macular degeneration, contact the Foundation on 1800 111 709 or visit [www.mdfoundation.com.au](http://www.mdfoundation.com.au)

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

#### **Macular Disease Foundation Australia Galaxy Results – March 2016**

(Consumer survey conducted by Galaxy Research, 18-20 March 2016. N= 1100 Australians aged over 16, N=549 Australians over 50 plus. Survey developed in conjunction with the Macular Disease Foundation Australia)

- 73% of Australians are aware of macular degeneration (up from 47% in 2007)
- 82% of those polled over 50 were aware that macular degeneration affects the eyes (up from 45% in 2007)
- 86% of people over 50 in the 'at risk' group had a macula check in the last two years (up from 33% in 2007 and 69% in 2014).