



**Senator the Hon Fiona Nash
ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR HEALTH**

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

14 November 2014

Take care of your sight this World Diabetes Day

Australians affected by diabetes are being urged to take regular eye tests to reduce the risk of serious vision loss or blindness.

The Assistant Minister for Health, Fiona Nash, joined the Macular Disease Foundation Australia (MDFA) today in warning that many people did not understand eye disease was a common consequence of diabetes.

“On World Diabetes Day today, I encourage all Australians who have or are at risk of developing diabetes to think carefully about how they would cope with losing their sight,” Minister Nash said.

“Diabetes-related eye disease is the leading cause of blindness and serious vision loss in working aged Australians. This is only likely to worsen as Type 2 diabetes becomes more common, fuelled by the rising incidence of overweight and obesity.

“If you have diabetes, please make it a priority to have regular eye tests so that any problems can be picked up early.”

The Chief Executive of MDFA, Julie Heraghty, said everyone with diabetes was at risk of developing diabetic eye disease – primarily diabetic retinopathy.

“Early diabetic retinopathy usually does not have any symptoms, and progressive damage can occur before any noticeable effects on your vision,” Ms Heraghty said.

“The longer you have had diabetes, the higher the chance you will get retinopathy. It is essential that people with diabetes have regular eye examinations so that changes can be detected early and treatment delivered before irreversible vision loss occurs.

“People with diabetes must have a comprehensive eye exam at least every two years and if there is any evidence of diabetic eye disease, these tests should be done every 12 months, or more often if advised by the ophthalmologist or optometrist.”

Minister Nash said the Government was looking forward to receiving the advice of the National Diabetes Strategy Advisory Group, regarding ways to improve prevention and management of diabetes.

The Macular Disease Foundation Australia today also released a free publication for the public and health care professionals called *Diabetic Eye Disease*. The publication is available free of charge from the Foundation on toll free Helpline 1800 111 709.

Media contacts:

Minister Nash’s office – Greg Doolan, 0433 345 323

Macular Disease Foundation Australia – Janice Clarkson 0432 870 787