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New eye health resources launched on World Sight Day set sights on non-English speaking Victorians

09 Oct



MEDIA RELEASE

When it comes to having eye tests, non-English speaking residents rank among the lowest in the state.

But a suite of new materials being launched today on World Sight Day by the Minister for Health, David Davis, as part of Vision 2020 Australia's Vision Initiative eye health program is targeting non-English speaking Victorians in a bid to encourage them to get an eye test.

Vision 2020 Australia CEO Jennifer Gersbeck said around 27 per cent of Victorian adults who spoke a language other than English at home had never had an eye test, compared to 20 per cent of English speaking Victorians who had. In local areas with high migrant populations these figures can be as high as 56 per cent. *

"These statistics are worrying and put a large number of Victorians at increased risk of eye conditions," Ms Gersbeck said.

"The growing number of migrants and refugees to Victoria means we anticipate there will be an explosion

of eye health issues over the next 10 years, unless these Victorians start having regular eye tests,” she said.

Ms Gersbeck said non-English speaking residents had greater issues around accessing services due to language and cultural barriers.

“Many new arrivals to Australia may not have experience of eye health in their own country and possibly are not aware of where to go for an eye test or what an eye health professional does. Often language also prohibits people from non-English speaking backgrounds from accessing information which is readily available for English-speaking Australians,” she said

The Vision Initiative has developed a set of resources in conjunction with eye health and health professionals in an effort to tackle these barriers and demystify eye health for those who do not speak English.

Among the resources are information sheets, multi-media clips which can be utilised by health services to explain the role of optometrists and ophthalmologists, brochures and posters which highlight the importance of eye examinations and good eye health care.

The materials will be available in Italian, Greek, Vietnamese, Arabic and Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese).

Australian College of Optometry (ACO) Chief Executive Officer, Maureen O’Keefe, said the ACO’s optometrists see many patients from non-English speaking backgrounds and are familiar with the challenges this presents.

“We know that there is a lack of information on general eye health in languages other than English. These new resources are the first critical step in raising awareness about the importance of eye health to non-English speaking communities.”

The resources will be available in October. For more information go to www.visioninitiative.org.au

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About the Vision Initiative

Managed by Vision 2020 Australia, the Vision Initiative is the Victorian Government’s public health response to the *National Framework for Action to Promote Eye Health and Prevent Avoidable Blindness and Vision Loss*.

Commencing in 2002, the aim of the Vision Initiative is to prevent avoidable blindness and address the impact of vision impairment in the Victorian community.

For more information visit: www.visioninitiative.org.au

About Vision 2020 Australia

Established in October 2000, Vision 2020 Australia is part of VISION 2020: The Right to Sight, a global initiative of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB).

As the national peak body for the eye health and vision care sector, Vision 2020 Australia represents around 50 member organisations involved in: local and global eye care; health promotion; low vision support; vision rehabilitation; eye research; professional assistance; and community support.

For more information visit: www.vision2020australia.org.au

About the Australian College of Optometry

The Australian College of Optometry (ACO) is an independent, not for profit, membership based organisation, dedicated to preserving sight and preventing blindness - the only institution of its kind in Australia. It was established in 1939 and is committed to the care of communities experiencing disadvantage through the provision of comprehensive public health eye care services. The ACO delivers a major public eye health program for the Victorian government and indigenous health programs for the Commonwealth government, and undertakes basic, clinical and translational research in vision and eye health through the National Vision Research Institute (a division of the ACO), as well as supporting the education and development of current and new generations of optometrists.

For more information visit: <http://www.aco.org.au>

* Victorian Department of Health, 2009, *2008 Victorian Population Health Survey (unpublished data)*, Victorian State Government, Melbourne

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