

ACO Invites COT Applicants

The Australian College of Optometry is accepting applicants for the September 2015 intake of its Certificate in Ocular Therapeutics (ACO-COT).

This will be the fourth remote learning COT course that the College has run, offering students a flexible approach to learning with online lectures, live interactive webinars, e-learning materials, and online forums and networking opportunities. According to one recent graduate the online format was particularly beneficial to the learning process because it provided, "the flexibility to re-listen to webinars and lectures". Another graduate's feedback stated, "the course is tailored for us as optometrists... the format allowed the information to be seen in context... which I found invaluable".

The College said the 12 month course would enable scheduled medicines endorsement for registered optometrists in Australia and New Zealand.

For information email acocot@aco.org.au or visit www.aco.org.au/professional-development.

Aviva and Mann Merge

Aviva Optical and Mann Optics have merged to form Aviva and Mann Optical Group.

The merged group will continue to represent the brands Centrostyle, Cocoons, Nano Vista, Slastik and Progear Eyeguard from offices in Brisbane and Perth. Warehousing and distribution operations will be located in the group's distribution centre in Perth, providing a 24 hour turnaround and delivery service for metropolitan clients.

National Eye Health Survey Launched

Australia's first National Eye Health Survey (NEHS) is being undertaken by Vision 2020 Australia and the Centre for Eye Research Australia (CERA). Launched at the Knox City OPSM store in Victoria on 12 June, the Survey is the first research of its kind to map the prevalence of major eye conditions in Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across Australia.

Member for Aston and Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, the Hon Alan Tudge MP, attended the launch and met with participants and partners involved in the Survey.

Vision 2020 Australia CEO, Jennifer Gersbeck, said the results from the testing site in Victoria's south eastern suburbs were an important part of the research and would help deliver a piece of the Australian eye health picture.

She said Australia's eye health was more at-risk as the population aged and as the diabetes epidemic continued to grow.

"As Australia's population ages we expect to see an increase in the number of people with conditions such as macular degeneration, glaucoma, cataract, diabetic retinopathy and refractive error. Being armed with accurate data will help us to manage these conditions efficiently and effectively," said Ms. Gersbeck.

Ms. Gersbeck said the NEHS was also critical in assisting Australia to meet its international obligations to the WHO's Global Action Plan (GAP), which sets a target to reduce avoidable blindness by 25 per cent by 2019. To achieve this goal, the Minister for Health last year endorsed a National Framework Implementation Plan on eye health and vision care, prioritising the improvement of the evidence base.

"The NEHS will help establish a baseline for tracking Australia's progress against the GAP and will provide an essential evidence base for the National Framework Implementation Plan," she said.

Principal Investigator, Dr. Mohamed Dirani said: "Health interventions and future programs are being planned and implemented based on 20 year old data. The National Eye Health Survey will give us an up to date, evidenced-based picture of the prevalence and causes of vision impairment in Australia.

"The project will be completed in mid-2016 with the eye health of both non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians being tested across 30 sites, including urban, regional and remote parts of the country.

"The results of the research will also provide invaluable follow up data for the National Indigenous Eye Health Survey conducted in 2008, where the effects of interventions since then can be assessed and specific eye health strategies for Indigenous communities can be better guided."

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The comprehensive National Eye Health Survey is a collaborative effort between government, non-government and the private sector to achieve better eye health and vision care outcomes for Australia. It is funded by the Australian Government under the Chronic Disease Prevention and Service Improvement Fund, with other contributions coming from CERA, OPSM, Novartis, Zeiss, Brien Holden Vision Institute, Optometry Australia, NACCHO and the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Optometry Australia CEO Genevieve Quilty said the Survey may be used to inform the Association's "National Eye Health Heat Map" (NEHMM) launched earlier this year, which used publicly available sources, such as Census and the National Health Service, to create a visual representation of various epidemiological, demographic and eye care indicators associated with population eye health.

The NEHMM enables users to explore individual factors strongly associated with eye health for a region, including ocular conditions and diseases, risk factors for ocular disease, demographic factors associated with eye health, and rates of optometric service provision. It also provides an 'eye care need score' for each ABS Statistical Area 3 (SA3) region.

"Although at this stage we have no firm plans to update the heat map from a data perspective in the near future, we most definitely view the heat map as an evolving tool; where our objective will be to integrate more up-to-date data as it becomes readily available," said Ms. Quilty.

"Integrating more eye health relevant data moving forward will not only support broader advocacy efforts but help optometrists better understand their local catchments, and by the same token potentially help service delivery planning of eye care services such as the Visiting Optometrists Scheme.

"Given it is a separate project, we have not yet had discussions with V2020 regarding the National Eye Health Survey data being made available for the eye health heat map, however I envisage we will do so," she said.