

Save Our Sight 2016

Thousands of New Zealanders every year needlessly live with vision problems that affect their everyday lives.

As the age of the New Zealand population increases, so do the most common eye diseases; Glaucoma, Macular Degeneration, Cataract and Diabetic Retinopathy.

Glaucoma NZ reports that in New Zealand there are 90,000 people over the age of 40 who have glaucoma; and more than half of them don't know it yet. Macular Degeneration NZ reports that 1 in 7 people over 50 will get macular degeneration (MD); smokers are three times more likely to have MD than those who have never smoked.

According to the 2013 NZ Census Data, around 168,000 New Zealanders are blind or have a sight impairment that cannot be corrected by glasses or contact lenses. This is more than double the 81,000 adults with vision impairment recorded in the 2006 Disability Survey Data.

To reduce our high levels of preventable blindness in New Zealand, it is vital for everyone to look after their eye health and have a comprehensive eye exam at regular intervals. This is the message the NZ Association of Optometrists is sharing with New Zealanders through the Save Our Sight campaign for 2016.

Starting in September, SOS aims to:

- Improve the eye health of New Zealanders by letting people know that having regular comprehensive eye exams can save their sight.
- Improve understanding among New Zealanders that eye health is an essential part of maintaining personal health and wellbeing and they can take action by scheduling regular comprehensive eye exams
- Educate people about the realities of living with impaired vision and the importance of vision for performance at school, at work, and at play.

Save Our Sight's focus for 2016 is all about early detection. Our message is: **"Don't get blindsided by eye disease"**

We want people to know that eye diseases can develop without any early warning signs, making early detection a vital step in avoiding or limiting permanent damage to the eyes.

It can be easy for people to assume they have perfect vision as symptoms of eye diseases generally occur in the later stages of the disease. What people may not realise is that once they notice a change in their vision, the eye disease may already have caused damage and is sometimes permanent and irreversible.

For the majority of us, our eyes are the most precious sense. That is why it is very important that we all look after our eyes and protect our vision by having regular eye examinations.

The New Zealand Association of Optometrists recommends a comprehensive eye exam every 2-3 years or sooner if you suspect something is wrong.

Early detection is a vital step in avoiding/limiting permanent damage to the eyes.



So how can a GP help save people's sight?

- Consider a referral for an optometrist report - this might make the process of diagnosing easier in the case of people with eye conditions.
- An optometrist referral may also assist in setting a priority for a patient who needs to move into secondary care for advancing eye disease.
- Help make people aware of the effects of vision loss.

Vision loss is associated with a higher than average risk of mortality because it is correlated with a higher risk of falls, motor vehicle accidents and depression (Centre for Eye Research Australia and Access Economics 2004).

There were 115 deaths attributable to vision loss in 2009 in New Zealand. No research has been done to quantify deaths attributable to vision loss in New Zealand in recent years but the 2009 figures are a reminder that vision impairment is more than just a nuisance.

The most common causes of blindness (excluding uncorrected refractive error) were AMD (48%), glaucoma (16%), and cataract (11%).

The last major study of the economic impact of vision loss in New Zealand was conducted by Access Economics in 2009. Entitled Clear Focus, the study report showed that the annual cost of blindness in New Zealand was \$2.8 billion, or \$22,217 per person with vision loss aged over 40 years.

We can do more for people at risk from sight threatening eye disease. Avastin and other anti-VEGF treatments have been a game changer for AMD making it possible to arrest sight loss and even restore some of the vision in many cases. Glaucoma treatments are now available to endorsed optometrists making it even easier to manage your glaucoma patients needing review. For those finding it hard to be seen in the hospital this can be a major benefit. OTC reports and fields analysis can be requested from many optometrists and make shared care of eye patients a good option for GPs.



PRIMARY eyecare

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