

Media Release
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Up to 10 000 Tasmanians are living with undiagnosed diabetes and at risk of blindness

Diabetes Tasmania and Eyelines have chosen World Sight Day to launch a new strategic partnership with a key focus to raise awareness about the important link between diabetes and vision loss.

The annual World Sight Day raises awareness of blindness and vision impairment, and according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of vision loss for Australians aged 30 to 69, and a significant cause of vision loss in older Australians.

Diabetes is the world's fastest growing chronic disease, however a simple eye test from your local optometrist can provide early detection and with early treatment the majority of diabetes-related vision loss can be prevented.

Diabetes Tasmania CEO Caroline Wells said many Australians with diabetes do not realise the importance of having regular eye tests.

"Only 50 per cent of Australians with diabetes have their eyes examined regularly and this number has not changed in the past two decades," Ms Wells said.

"The figures are even lower for Indigenous Australians, with only around 20 per cent having regular eye examinations.

"In Tasmania, we know that over 27,000 Tasmanians have diagnosed diabetes and are registered on the National Diabetes Service Scheme register, but an estimated 10,000 Tasmanians are living with undiagnosed type 2 diabetes and a further 45,000 are at high risk of developing the disease.

"Everyone with diabetes is at risk of developing diabetic retinopathy, which damages the retina in the back of the eye and causes vision loss, but those who are most at risk include people who have had diabetes for many years, those whose diabetes is poorly controlled, those with kidney damage and those with high blood pressure or high blood cholesterol.

Eyelines optometrist, Paul Fountain said that a simple eye examination by your local optometrist can be the first time signs of diabetes are detected and early detection and timely treatment can prevent the majority of diabetes-related vision loss.

"Too many Australians are presenting with vision loss from advanced disease and in many of these cases their long-term visual outcomes are poor. It's a tragedy when so much of this vision loss could easily be prevented," Ms Wells said.

A Medicare rebate is available for eye consultations.

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