



Australian Society of Ophthalmologists

MEDIA RELEASE

Australian Society of Ophthalmologists Incorporated ABN 29 454 001 424

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ASO RENEWS CALL FOR FUNDING AFTER 81 YEAR-OLD WAITS 18 MONTHS TO SEE AN EYE SPECIALIST

The case of 81-year-old Bundaberg man Jim Connellan, who waited more than 18 months to see an ophthalmologist for a persistent eye complaint and is now facing a further three month wait for cataract surgery, highlights major specialist shortfalls which the Australian Society of Ophthalmologists (ASO) has been lobbying the State Government over for the past 12 months.

ASO President Dr Bradley Horsburgh says more than 9,000 Queenslanders are currently waiting to be seen by an eye specialist on public hospital outpatient waiting lists.

He says regional areas like Bundaberg and small rural communities are the worst affected, where ophthalmologist numbers are inadequate to support local populations and in a number of cases they are simply non-existent.

“Queensland-wide we currently have about 40 ophthalmologists providing services to public hospital patients,” Dr Horsburgh said.

“The number needed is about 60,” he said.

According to the ASO, the problem is two-fold.

First, there are not enough doctors working in the public system.

“Stretched public hospital budgets leave major metropolitan hospitals with skeleton-like specialist teams handling massive workloads and rural and regional hospitals often unable to recruit specialists to come and work and live in the area,” Dr Horsburgh said.

A recent survey conducted by the ASO of more than 300 Australian ophthalmologists found close to 40 per cent were willing to either increase or commence sessions in public hospitals if required.

However, they said a number of factors were restricting them from doing so.

“The inefficiency of outpatient services, and a lack of funded theatre sessions to operate on patients identified for procedures, are the reason why many ophthalmologists are not working in the public sector,” Dr Horsburgh said.

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The ASO has regularly called on the State Government to inject realistic amounts of funding into public hospitals.

“We need a commitment from the State Government to increase the number of visiting medical officer positions in our public hospitals so that we can get more doctors working at the coalface rather than increasing bureaucratic oversight – bureaucrats can’t treat patients,” Dr Horsburgh said.

Ends.

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