



Australian Society of Ophthalmologists

MEDIA RELEASE

Australian Society of Ophthalmologists Incorporated ABN 29 454 001 424

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SURGERY FOR CHILDHOOD VISION IMPAIRMENT MAY SOON BE UNAVAILABLE

Less than 25 ophthalmologists in Australia are currently specialising in treatment of children with vision impairment – a dwindling number that will continue to decline, the Australian Society of Ophthalmologists (ASO) warned today.

The situation is particularly critical in NSW, Victoria and Queensland. In Queensland, at present just two eye surgeons exclusively treat paediatric cases.

The reason, according to the ASO, is a matter of simple economics. Paediatric ophthalmology consultation rebates do not cover the cost of practice overheads.

With the Federal Election campaign in full swing, the ASO is calling on both sides of politics to give this neglected area of medicine the attention it deserves.

ASO President Dr Bradley Horsburgh said thousands of Australian children were missing out on vision correcting treatment because of inadequate management of our health system.

“The basis of Medicare is the provision of fair and equitable health care and yet the system operates with huge imbalances like this, where the rebates for paediatric eye cases in comparison with adult eye cases won’t even cover the cost of consultations, let alone surgery,” Dr Horsburgh said.

Paediatric consultations take longer and are often very complex.

“An election commitment from both parties to redress this gaping imbalance is a must,” Dr Horsburgh said.

Ophthalmic surgeon Dr Denis Stark sees hundreds of Queensland children with vision impairment each year. Dr Stark performs vision correcting surgery on many of these children.

Dr Stark is a senior ophthalmologist and one of just two eye surgeons in Queensland who operate predominantly on children. He plans to retire in a few short years.

“I am concerned about the future,” Dr Stark said.

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“I have watched as the number of doctors choosing to work in this field has declined and it is hard to blame them for making the choice. It is slow and difficult but methodical and generally an under recognised area of medicine,” he said.

“By neglecting to give patients valuable rebates for these cases the Government is hurting our children and our future as a nation – these children make up a substantial portion of our future workforce,” he says.

“We must re-establish senior consultation positions in each state and territory’s major public hospital. We must rebuild paediatric ophthalmology,” Dr Stark said.

ENDS.

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