



Australian Society of Ophthalmologists

MEDIA RELEASE

Australian Society of Ophthalmologists Incorporated ABN 29 454 001 424

ASO CALLS FOR ACTION ON MACULAR DEGENERATION

Thursday 13 October 2011

The Australian Society of Ophthalmologists called on the Federal Government to ensure adequate access to treatment for Macular Degeneration (MD), the leading cause of blindness in Australia.

The call came following today's release of new research predicting the number of people in Australia suffering with late stages of the disease could double in the next two decades, citing Australia's ageing population as the main trigger for the rise.

The ASO said the MD Foundation report undertaken by Deloitte Access Economics, has now publically highlighted an issue it had raised with the Federal Government during Medicare Benefit Schedule review proceedings - vital deliberations which are ongoing.

ASO retinal specialist Dr Brendan Vote said ophthalmologists had been aware of the growing rates of MD in the community for some time.

"The problem with this rapidly emerging health situation is that accessing public treatment is difficult, particularly in rural and remote areas," Dr Vote said.

"Affordable treatment is currently not widely available and there are difficulties treating patients as quickly as possible.

"Factor in burgeoning patient loads and you have a major problem."

Dr Vote said the Federal Health Department needed to resolve access and affordability issues in the treatment of MD and put the health of Australian patients first.

"We now have solid evidence that patient rates are set to rise dramatically. It is the Federal Government's responsibility to ensure our health system is going to be able to cope with this rise," he said.

The ASO has been working with the Federal Government since the resolution of the issue of cataract rebates for patients to provide guaranteed high quality eye health services, particularly cataract surgery, to remote and indigenous Australians through the mutually developed Indigenous and Remote Eye Health Service (IRIS).

"IRIS is ideally arranged and focused to assist Government in providing MD treatment to rural and remote Australia in conjunction with existing cataract services," said Dr Mark Loane Chairman of IRIS.

Ends.

Contact ASO Media Advisor Sarah Todman: 0425 883 304

All correspondence: PO Box 1300 Spring Hill Qld 4004

President: Dr Brad Horsburgh Ph: 07 3831 3004 / Fax: 07 3831 3005