

MEDIA RELEASE

Eye health at the centre of international white paper Macular Disease Foundation Australia welcomes findings

The Macular Disease Foundation Australia welcomes the release of a white paper, *“Advocating for Improved Treatment and Outcomes for Wet Age-Related Macular Degeneration”*.

The Angiogenesis Foundation’s white paper is the result of a convening of international experts in Sydney last July to develop a road map for the management of ‘wet’ age-related macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in Australia.

The Australian Wet Age-Related Macular Degeneration Coalition Expert Summit was convened by the Angiogenesis Foundation and Macular Disease Foundation Australia (formerly Macular Degeneration Foundation) which marked a significant step forward in the fight against this eye disease.

Healthcare stakeholders from across Australia gathered in Sydney to address barriers to timely and optimal care for Australian patients suffering from vision loss due to wet age-related macular degeneration.

Macular Disease Foundation Australia CEO, Julie Heraghty said, “The document summarises key discussions from the summit and makes specific recommendations aimed at informing national health services, the clinical and research community, and patient advocates.

“We hope this white paper will play an important role in influencing the management of macular degeneration in the future. The treatment window for wet age-related macular degeneration is relatively short, so any delay in treatment can mean the difference between retaining vision and going blind” said Heraghty.

The number of Australians living with age-related macular degeneration is expected to grow to over 1.7 million by 2030 in the absence of effective prevention and treatment measures.

Australia is a global leader in providing affordable and accessible care to people with wet age-related macular degeneration, however there is still more that can be done for all those in need and to reduce the burden of treatment.

New therapies and diagnostic techniques have produced a paradigm shift in the diagnosis and treatment of wet age-related macular degeneration, specifically antiangiogenesis therapy and spectral domain optical coherence tomography (SD-OCT). These techniques - along with early diagnosis - can prevent, slow and in some cases even reverse vision loss. However, along with other barriers to treatment, affordability of OCT has been an issue for Australian patients, rendering a need for greater access to treatment.

“Wet AMD is a silent epidemic of the aging global population,” commented Dr. William Li, President of the Angiogenesis Foundation. “Helping the elderly preserve their vision through effective use of antiangiogenic treatments is an important way to ensure a high quality of life.”

The white paper provides an extensive analysis of the issues and needs for age-related macular degeneration patients in Australia’s healthcare system, and can be downloaded from the Macular Disease Foundation’s website www.mdffoundation.com.au.

For further information on macular degeneration phone the free call number 1800 111 709 or visit www.mdffoundation.com.au.

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About the Macular Disease Foundation Australia

The Macular Disease Foundation Australia (formerly the Macular Degeneration Foundation) is the national charity committed to reducing the incidence and impact of macular disease in Australia.

In January 2013 the Macular Degeneration Foundation proudly changed its name to the Macular Disease Foundation Australia to champion all macular diseases primarily macular degeneration, along with diabetic retinopathy, retinal vein occlusion and macular dystrophies. For further information on macular degeneration, phone the free call number 1800 111 709 or visit www.mdfoundation.com.au.

About the Angiogenesis Foundation

The US based Angiogenesis Foundation, founded in 1994, is the world's first nonprofit organisation dedicated to conquering disease using a new approach based on angiogenesis, the growth of new capillary blood vessels in the body.

About Angiogenesis

Angiogenesis is the growth of new capillary blood vessels in the body. It is an important natural process in the body used for healing and reproduction. The body controls angiogenesis by producing a precise balance of growth and inhibitory factors in healthy tissues. When this balance is disturbed, the result is either too much or too little angiogenesis (blood vessel growth) which can lead to stimulation of disease growth.

About Macular Degeneration

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness and vision loss in Australia. All Australians over the age of 50 years should have an eye test and make sure their macula is checked. The macula is the central part of the retina, which is the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye. The macula processes all central visual images and is responsible for the ability to drive, see colours clearly, read and recognise faces. Macular degeneration causes damage to the macula, resulting in central vision loss.

Australians should also be aware of the symptoms of macular degeneration, which can include one or more of the following:

- Difficulty with reading or any other activity with fine vision
- Distortion where straight lines appear wavy or bent
- Distinguishing faces becomes a problem
- Dark patches or empty spaces appear in the centre of your vision

Over one million people in Australia have some evidence of macular degeneration and in the absence of effective prevention and treatment measures, this number will increase to over 1.7 million by 2030, creating an even greater burden on the health, disability and aged care systems.ⁱ

The impact of macular degeneration on quality of life is equivalent to cancer or coronary heart disease.ⁱⁱ The prevalence of macular degeneration is four times that of dementia and more than half that of diabetes.

ⁱ Eyes on the future - A clear outlook on age-related macular degeneration. Report by Deloitte Access Economics & Macular Degeneration Foundation, 2011.

ⁱⁱ The Global Economic Cost of Visual Impairment - Access Economics & AMDAI 2010