



**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **Commitment to Save Sight of 47,000 Australians**

*Fifteen years after eye injections arrived in Australia, a proposed Medicare rebate cut to sight saving treatment is rejected by both major parties*

Minister for Health, Greg Hunt has confirmed his support of the Macular Disease Foundation Australia's (MDFA) call to reject the proposed recommendation to cut the Medicare rebate on sight saving treatment if the Coalition is returned to Government.

The independent Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Review Taskforce for Ophthalmology recommended to the Government that the Medicare rebate for sight saving eye injections be cut by 69%. Economic modelling commissioned by MDFA estimated that the proposed cut would trigger out-of-pocket costs for wet AMD patients to balloon from the current \$1,900 per year to \$3,900 per year – double if the disease impacts both eyes.<sup>1</sup>

Minister Hunt has confirmed that this specific recommendation to Government is not under consideration. He invited the Foundation to be part of the Implementation Liaison Group established to review the recommendations and to ensure it would not have any unintended consequences for patients or barriers to access treatments.

*"Our priority is that Australians get access to this critical treatment to save sight. Optimal health is central to decision making,"* Mr Hunt said.

Shadow Minister Mark Butler's office has also confirmed that the Labor Party will not be considering this Taskforce recommendation if they form the next Government.

*"MDFA welcomes this decision by the two major parties. Out-of-pocket costs are a driver of patient adherence to treatment. Our modelling showed that the proposed cut would have resulted in an additional 47,000 Australians experiencing permanent vision loss or blindness in the next five years."* said MDFA CEO, Dee Hopkins.

Since its introduction in Australia 15 years ago, sight saving injections have revolutionised the management of multiple neovascular macular conditions including age-related macular degeneration (wet AMD), diabetic macular oedema, and retinal vein occlusion. This treatment is non-curative, and it is essential that patients maintain regular injections to retain vision.

While MDFA supported many of the 19 recommendations made by the MBS Review Taskforce, it had concerns about the impact of the proposed rebate cut to patients in a system that is already challenging for many to access. Government data shows that 25% of patients receiving eye injections drop out of treatment after the first 12 months, leading to irreversible vision loss or blindness.<sup>2</sup>

MDFA research found that 29% of patients on this treatment considered delaying or stopping treatment due to cost of treatment while 40% had considered delaying or stopping treatment due to travel issues accessing their nearest eye doctor.<sup>3</sup>

*“We look forward to working with the Government of the 47<sup>th</sup> Parliament to ensure all Australians have improved access to sight saving treatment – particularly as our population ages.”* Ms Hopkins said.

**-ENDS-**

### **More information**

#### **About Macula Month**

Macula Month is MDFA’s annual campaign each May to raise awareness of macular disease – Australia’s leading cause of severe vision loss and blindness.

In 2022, Macula Month coincides with the Federal Election. MDFA is committed to advocating for affordable access to sight-saving treatment.

#### **About Macular Disease Foundation Australia**

MDFA is the national peak body representing the voice of the macular disease community. Our purpose is to reduce the incidence and impact of macular disease. MDFA undertakes advocacy work in accordance with its charitable purpose and in accordance with the guidelines set by the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission and complies with relevant legislation. MDFA is not aligned to any political party and works with both the Government of the day and the Opposition and always maintains our independence.

As well as advocacy on behalf of every Australian living with and at risk of macular disease, we provide a range of free resources and support services via our National Helpline (1800 111 709) and our website ([www.mdffoundation.com.au](http://www.mdffoundation.com.au)).

#### **About macular disease**

Macular disease covers a range of painless conditions that affect the central retina (the macula) at the back of the eye. The most common are age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and diabetic retinopathy (DR), including diabetic macular oedema (DMO).

AMD accounts for 50 per cent of blindness in Australia. One in seven (approximately 1.4 million) Australians over the age of 50 have some evidence of AMD.

Diabetic eye disease affects between 300,000 and 400,000 Australians – the leading cause of preventable blindness among the working-age population.

## Reference

<sup>1</sup> PwC (2019). *Impact of IVI rebate changes*.

<sup>2</sup> DUSC (2018). *Ranibizumab and Aflibercept: Analysis of Use for AMD, DMO, BRVO and CRVO*.

<sup>3</sup> PwC (2020). *Estimating the costs and associated impact of new models of care for intravitreal injections report*.

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