



Macular
Disease
Foundation
AUSTRALIA

Our 2025 Impact:

Fighting for Sight



YEAR IN REVIEW

From the Chair

Throughout this year, I have been reminded again of the extraordinary strength and resilience of the macular disease community – and the power of collective action to drive meaningful change.

We've seen firsthand how advocacy can shift policy, how research can offer hope, and how community involvement can drive progress. But we also know there is still much to do. Too many Australians continue to face barriers to treatment, especially in regional and rural areas. Too many live with uncertainty about their vision and their future.

2026 will mark the 25th Anniversary of Macular Disease Foundation Australia (MDFA). This is not just a moment of reflection, but a time to honour the progress we've made together – and to recommit to the work ahead. We look forward to sharing this milestone with you.



Graeme Head AO
Chair

From the CEO

This year has been defined by impact. From expanding our support services to those living with macular disease, to research innovations and policy wins, we've continued to push forward with purpose, guided by the voices of those living with macular disease.

Every conversation, every story shared, and every act of generosity has helped shape our direction and deepen our commitment to those we serve.

That's why our focus remains clear: to fund bold research, advocate for fair access to care, and ensure that no one is left behind. As we look ahead to the next chapter, we do so with renewed energy and a deep sense of responsibility.

Thank you for standing with us in our Fight for Sight. Together, we are building a future where sight is protected, treatment is accessible, and every person affected by macular disease feels supported and heard.



Dr Kathy Chapman
CEO

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

\$1 million+
invested in 8 new
research projects

700+
people supported
through Eye Connect

6000+
support calls

1600+
volunteer hours
contributed

1500
people completed
the latest social
impact survey

18 education
sessions reaching
500+ people

1042 health
professionals
completed our
professional
development courses

250,000+
people have now
completed the
Check My Macula quiz

ADVOCACY

Advocating for accessible and affordable treatment

Fighting for the sight of people with macular disease remains our top priority. In the lead up to the federal election, we urged national leaders to address the cost and access barriers to sight-saving treatment.

Our Federal Election Agenda, Fight for Sight, called on the Government to invest in increasing access to bulk-billed eye injections for pensioners – potentially saving the health system millions of dollars annually.

The financial burden of treatment

New research conducted with the University of New South Wales revealed that the median total cost for people living with macular disease who also receive sight-saving eye injections is \$3,621, which is 12 percent of the annual government pension payment.

These expenses, including specialist appointments, eye injections, and vision aids, leave many struggling to afford essentials like rent, food, and bills. Without treatment, vision loss is inevitable. Even outside a cost-of-living crisis, affordable access to treatment remains out of reach for many pensioners, low-income earners, and self-funded retirees.

To ease this burden, we recommended a Neovascular AMD Treatment Incentive Program to encourage ophthalmologists to bulk bill pension card holders. This \$11.1 million initiative could save the Government \$140 million annually by preventing avoidable vision loss.

“During my eye injection appointments, I’ve enquired on many occasions as to how aged pensioners with no available funds can afford to have their AMD treated. To date, I have received no definitive answer. I find this very worrying as I may soon find myself in this position.”

– **Liz, macular disease community member**

Protecting access to eye injections

We also welcomed a major win: the Government’s decision to postpone changes to the Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS) item for intravitreal injections. These changes would have prevented more than 12,000 people from being able to use their private health insurance to pay for treatment in private hospitals or day surgeries, leading to new out-of-pocket costs for essential treatment – costs that could have made continuing care impossible.

More than 100 community members contacted us, distressed about the potential impact. We were encouraged that the voices of the macular disease community were heard by the Government.

As we look ahead, MDFA remains committed to advocating for equitable, affordable access to sight-saving treatment for all Australians.

RESEARCH

Investing in sight-saving research

This year we proudly invested more than \$1 million in eight new groundbreaking research projects in our 2025 funding round. These initiatives aim to improve treatments, ease the burden on those living with macular disease, and help protect future generations from its impact.

The new funding brings MDFA's total research investment to \$6.9 million across 42 projects since the launch of our Research Grants Program in 2011. We remain the largest non-government funder of macular and retinal disease research in Australia.

Launching two new grants

To celebrate the lead-up to MDFA's 25th Anniversary, this year we were pleased to launch two new research grants to help reduce the impact of macular disease on Australians.

These grants were made possible thanks to two generous donations.

MDFA 25th Anniversary Award

The MDFA 25th Anniversary Award is a significant investment of up to \$200,000 over three years to support research into geographic atrophy, a form of AMD.

Also known as late-stage dry AMD, geographic atrophy is a progressive condition where retinal cells die, leading to patches of missing retina and central vision loss. It is estimated that around 100,000 Australians may be living with the condition.

This new grant responds directly to feedback from researchers and community members living with geographic atrophy, which highlighted a critical need to prioritise research addressing key knowledge gaps in geographic atrophy.

We are very proud to launch this new grant and take a major step forward in advancing understanding of geographic atrophy – one of the most pressing unmet needs in eye health.



Elisabeth Macdonald Memorial Award

Elisabeth Macdonald was a long-time supporter of MDFA who cared deeply about the challenges faced by people living with macular disease in rural and regional Australia.

Elisabeth moved to Armidale in 1969, where she lived on acreage outside of town and considered herself a die-hard "bushie." Following her early-stage age-related macular degeneration (AMD) diagnosis in 2005 – and later with neovascular (wet) AMD in 2010 – she made the tough decision to move closer to medical support in the town centre.

Created in collaboration with Elisabeth before her passing, the Elisabeth Macdonald Memorial Award is a \$500,000 gift to be delivered as \$100,000 grants supporting innovative solutions to improve vision health, care and support for people living with a macular or retinal disease in regional and rural areas.

Living with a macular disease, and the associated vision loss, is an ongoing challenge for people in regional and rural Australia, where access to specialist care and sight-saving treatment remains more limited.

By investing in research that focuses on the unique challenges faced outside our major cities, we're not only helping improve access to care – we're deepening our understanding of the challenges of living with a macular disease in these communities.

This new research award will help drive solutions that are grounded in the realities of rural life, helping ensure no one is left behind when it comes to protecting their vision.



EYE CONNECT

Helping Australians with AMD feel understood and connected

Since its launch last year, our free Eye Connect service has made a great impact in the community, empowering more than 700 Australians living with age-related macular disease (AMD) with personalised, evidence-based information, practical advice and emotional support.

We know that for many, Eye Connect has become a trusted companion – offering clarity, comfort and connection between clinical appointments, when many feel uncertain or alone.

Building on this success, Eye Connect expanded in 2025 to support people living with diabetes-related eye conditions. Of the 1.5 million Australians diagnosed with diabetes, between 25% to 35% of people have some degree of diabetic retinopathy. Among them, an estimated 91,000 are living with diabetic macular oedema, a complication of diabetic retinopathy. These conditions are the leading cause of preventable blindness among working-age Australians.

The expansion marks a major milestone:

Eye Connect is now Australia's first national support service dedicated to both AMD and diabetes-related eye conditions.

NEW THIS YEAR

Eye Connect Check, an easy-to-use online self-assessment tool that helps people understand how the service can support them on their journey with AMD or a diabetes-related eye condition. www.mdfoundation.com.au/eye-connect-check



Sue's story

Sue, who lives with AMD, is one of the hundreds of people who have benefited from the support Eye Connect offers through its qualified and trained team. Sue witnessed her parents' experience with the disease, so she understood the difficult road ahead after receiving her own diagnosis.

"I was feeling really deeply disappointed about being diagnosed with AMD and the uncertainty that brings," she said. "I often had questions after I left the clinic, so I joined Eye Connect for support in between appointments."

"They listened to my emotions, and they listen to my questions and give me answers. And I always come away feeling calmer because I've felt heard and understood."

"Eye Connect gives me ongoing support and resources tailored to me without leaving home."

Eye Connect will continue to make a meaningful difference, helping Australians feel informed, connected, and less isolated as they navigate life with AMD and diabetes-related eye conditions.

"They listened to my emotions, and they listen to my questions and give me answers."

– Sue, Eye Connect participant



Supporting the next generation of eye health professionals

This year we continued our work with orthoptic and optometry students across Australia, helping them prepare for meaningful careers in eye health.

We collaborated with universities including UTS, UNSW, and the University of Canberra to deliver lectures and webinars that introduced students to the human experience of vision loss from macular disease and the importance of patient-centred care – complementing their clinical training with real-world insights.

These sessions explored the lived experience of progressive vision loss, encouraging students to think about holistic care for their future patients. At the heart of our presentations was a focus on empathy and communication. We addressed not only the impact on vision, but also every aspect of a person's life, highlighting the importance of referrals to services that can provide support in between clinical appointments.

A highlight was the integration of our CPD education modules into the University of Canberra's optometry curriculum. Students now complete modules on AMD, diabetes-related eye conditions, and inherited retinal diseases – enhancing their understanding of disease management and fostering lifelong learning.

Our university engagement also encourages students to educate patients, understand referral pathways, and consider non-clinical career paths that contribute meaningfully to patient wellbeing.

We welcomed an Optometry Honours student from UNSW, whose research project evaluates the long-term impact of our Eye Connect service. The project offered him hands-on experience in service evaluation and builds transferrable skills in research, data analysis, and patient-centred care.

Our work with students is about more than education – it's about partnership. Together, we're equipping the next generation with the tools, insights, and compassion they need to make a lasting difference in the lives of people living with macular disease – in ways that reach far beyond the clinic.

GOVERNANCE

Macular Disease Foundation's Board and Committees are the driving force behind our mission to reduce the impact of macular disease. We are fortunate to have Australia's eminent medical, research, and business specialists informing our work and helping us shape a future where sight is protected for all.

Board Directors



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FIPAA
Chair



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FAICD



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B.Bus, CA, GAICD



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Wilson Heriot**
MBBS, FRANZCO



**Associate Professor
Alex Hunyor**
MBBS (Hons), FRANZCO



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(retired May 2025)



Ms Gillian Shea
B.Bus, CA



Ms Susan Williams
BArgSc, MPH, CFRE



Mr Neil Wykes OAM
BCom, FCA, AGIA, ACIS



**Professor Sanchia Aranda
AM**
PhD, GAICD (joined August 2025)

GOVERNANCE

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Ms Emma Cleary

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FRCOphth FAFPHM

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Mr Neil Wykes OAM
Mr Peter Abrahamson
Ms Emma Cleary

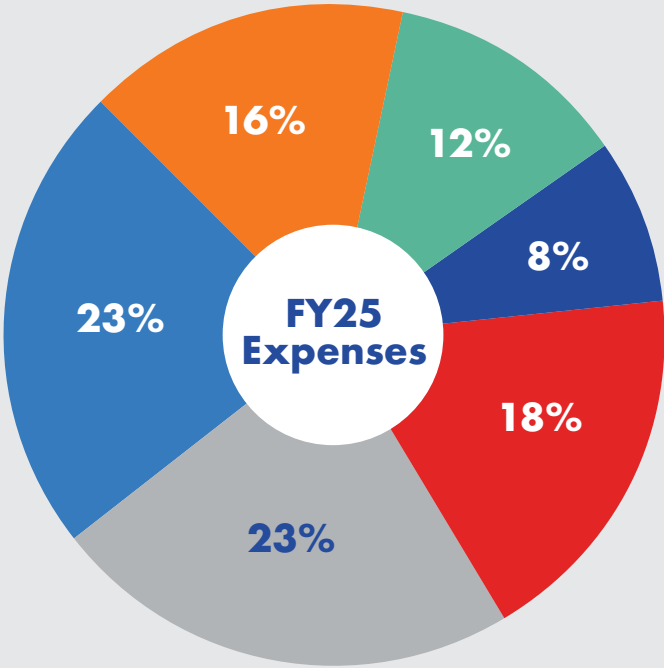
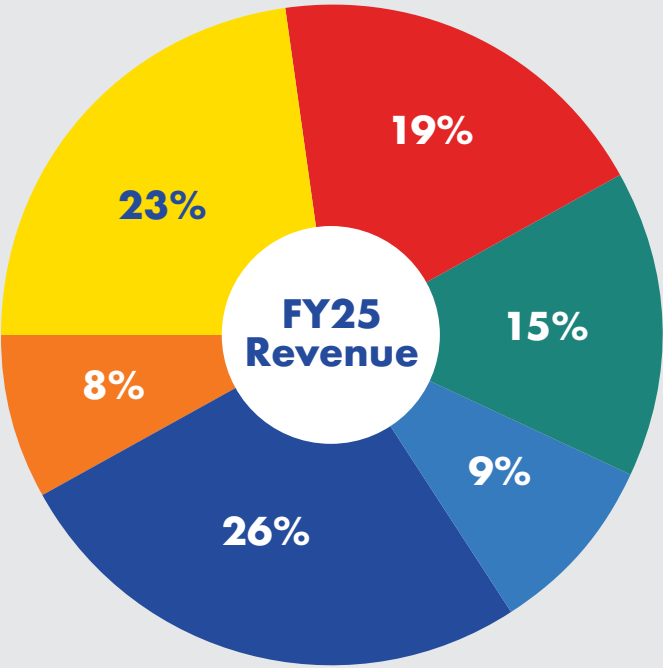
Fundraising and Engagement Committee

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Ms Lisa Lusthaus
Ms Susan Williams

Community Reference Group

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Mr Godwin Abela
Ms Lucy Arundell
Mr Ashley Chapman
Mr Barry Clarke OAM
Ms Fran Cutler OC
Mr Rohan Goyne
Ms Lily Holloway
Mrs Val Nicholson
Ms France Pilavakis
Ms Susan Rau
Ms Kristina Ward

FINANCIALS



Revenue \$4,417,000

- Government Grants \$845,000
- Donations \$643,000
- Trust & Foundations \$388,000
- Bequests \$1,167,000
- Sponsorship \$359,000
- Investment Gains \$1,016,000

Expenses \$4,369,000

- Research Grants & Other Research Projects \$531,000
- Advocacy \$360,000
- Awareness and Early Detection & Health Care Professionals \$794,000
- Services & Support to the Macular Disease Community \$992,000
- Operational Costs \$1,009,000
- Fundraising Activities \$683,000



**Macular
Disease
Foundation**
AUSTRALIA



We're here to support you every step of the way

Macular Disease Foundation Australia offers a range of services to help ensure Australians living with a macular condition are equipped to adjust to changes in vision and live their best possible quality of life.

These services include:

- Eye Connect – our free, personalised service for people living with AMD or a diabetes-related eye condition
- Peer support groups – connect with other people living with macular disease online or in-person in locations across Australia
- Education sessions – we host sessions and online webinars where you can learn about macular disease and how to live well with it
- National Helpline – support is just a phone call away for you, a friend, or a family member

Whether you're newly diagnosed or navigating life with vision loss, we are here to help you.

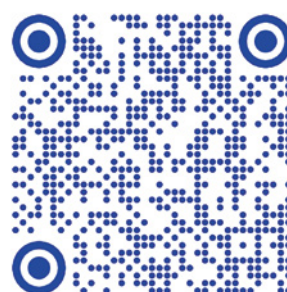
Thank you

A sincere thank you to everyone who worked with us this year – every person living with macular disease, every carer, supporter, donor, volunteer, researcher, eye health professional and advocate.

Your ongoing support empowers our purpose to reduce the impact of macular disease on people and families across Australia.

Together let's continue the Fight for Sight and support even more people in the year ahead.

SCAN TO MAKE A DONATION TODAY



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