

World Sight Day: an international day of awareness of avoidable blindness

Focus was on family history of eye disease and increased risk

Fourteenth of October was World Sight Day, an international day of awareness around the global of avoidable blindness and impairment.

In addition to supporting the of members, Vision 2020 Australia undertook activity of its including a national advocacy out sent to all federal and a parliamentarians containing sessages, a World Sight Day o wear on the day and two case ; John Egglestone, a 71 year torian man with glaucoma and 'ath, a 66 year old Cambodian who received sight-restoring surgery as a result of work Vision 2020 Australia Global ium.

ere was no global theme this sion 2020 Australia used the focus on family history and eased risk if a serious eye n such as glaucoma or aged-macular degeneration exists family history for the Vision e program.

dia picture opportunity was in Melbourne's Parliament ardens on the day with the health minister David Davis. ister was pictured with three dogs-in-training from Guide ctoria as well as a powerful y.

Bavage, 38, was diagnosed coma when she was 28 and aware until recently of how y glaucoma featured in her Her mother, grandmother, t and her second cousin all coma making her two young eight times more likely to the disease. Ayse's story critical reminder about the e of regular eye tests to sight.

ally the direct cost of eye disease in 2009 is at \$2.98 billion. In Victoria, ts are estimated at \$652 approximately a quarter of l cost," Mr Davis said.

ing eye sight can improve omes. To be as healthy as we need a strong focus on " he said.



Ayse Bavage, Emma and Jack Bavage, David Davis and Jan Field with the three guide dogs

Vision 2020 Australia also distributed a media release to print, television, radio, online and eye-health media. The media release encouraged people to start talking about eye health with their parents and grandparents as having all the facts is a powerful tool when it comes to tackling vision loss and blindness.

Radio interviews were also given with several different stations including: ABC 666 in Canberra, ABC 774 in Melbourne, Radio National's 'Life Matters' program, and Vision Australia's 'Talking Vision' program.

Activity conducted by Vision 2020 members included the World Sight Day Challenge, radio broadcasts, various articles published in member publications, segments on national television promoting the key messages, and fund-raising events.

A survey commissioned by Vision 2020 Australia found only 22 per cent of Victorians polled were aware that serious eye conditions such as age-

related macular degeneration and glaucoma were part of their family history. In contrast, nearly twice that many people knew there was a family history of heart disease.

"The family history awareness figures revealed by the Newspoll are alarming. Research indicates that the number of people aware of family history should be much higher," Associate Professor Ecosse Lamoureux from the Centre for Eye Research Australia, said.

Vision 2020 Australia chief executive officer Jennifer Gersbeck said the risk of getting serious eye conditions such as AMD or glaucoma increases dramatically if there is a family history.

"If you have a relative with macular degeneration, you have a fifty per cent chance of developing the disease yourself, while those with a parent with glaucoma are more than eight times more likely to develop the disease," Ms Gersbeck said.

"And what's worse, for those people who are over the age of 40, the risk of developing any eye condition is even higher," she said.

Ms Gersbeck said while there was a perception that heart attacks were more debilitating than low vision or blindness, many people did not stop to think about what life would be like if they could not see.

The good news is more than 75 per cent of vision loss is preventable or treatable.

Vision 2020 Australia chairman Dr Barry Jones, has glaucoma and says the best defence against many of the main eye conditions is regular eye examinations.

"By detecting eye problems early it's possible for many people to save their sight, reduce the effects of eye disease, or maintain a level of vision which enables people to maintain their independence and carry out many of the daily tasks of life," Dr Jones said.