



NATIONAL DIABETES EYE SCREENING PROGRAM

Most vision loss from diabetes can be avoided through early detection and treatment. Yet too many Australians living with diabetes are missing out on eye checks that could prevent them from losing their sight. It is estimated more than 600,000 Australians with diabetes are not accessing recommended eye checks for early detection of diabetic retinopathy. There are about 100,000 people with vision threatening diabetic retinopathy, and this will double by 2030.

To tackle this problem, Diabetes Australia and Vision 2020 Australia have been jointly advocating for many years for a diabetes blindness prevention initiative.

Now, thanks to an initial grant from the Australian Government and matching funding from the private sector, a new national program will be established to support development of an electronic eye health record and ensure people registered with the National Diabetes Services Scheme get regular reminders to have their eyes checked.

This Australian-first initiative is a major step in the fight against diabetes-related vision loss and blindness. Diabetes Australia will partner with Vision 2020 Australia, Oculo, Specsavers and many leading organisations in the eye health and diabetes sectors to deliver this critical initiative. The program was developed with widespread consultation and support from the sector over the past few years.

The Australian Government will provide \$1 million in funding for year one to commence development of the program. The funding is for a clear proposal put forward by leading diabetes and eye health groups and is supported by Government. Specsavers has committed a matching \$1 million a year for five years. Other industry partners are expected to contribute funding and ongoing Government funding will be sought for a five-year program.

The Problem

There are over 1.25 million people currently diagnosed with diabetes and registered on the National Diabetes Services Scheme. In addition, an estimated 500,000 people have silent, undiagnosed type 2 diabetes.

More than 100,000 people are newly diagnosed with diabetes each year. Every person with diabetes is at risk of diabetes-related eye disease (diabetic retinopathy).

The cost of diabetes related eye disease is huge – well over \$2 billion annually in Australia. This is more than \$28,000 per person.

Vision loss from diabetes is largely avoidable with adequate screening and timely management. Globally, screening and early intervention programs for diabetes are proven to reduce vision loss and blindness and have been proven to be cost effective. Effective screening for diabetic retinopathy (DR) has enormous impact –

preserving sight, avoiding blindness, enabling ongoing independence and productivity, and creating savings for the health system.

The solution

A new national diabetes eye screening program will “connect” the existing database of the National Diabetes Service Scheme and the eye care clinical communications platform of Oculo to enable eye care and diabetes care providers to securely create and view electronic eye health records and clinical images for their patients. It will also facilitate a proactive, targeted alert and reminder system to encourage people to have timely eye checks.

The program will involve three parts

- **Eye check alert and reminder system**

The existing National Diabetes Service Scheme (NDSS) database will be used to create a targeted and proactive eye check awareness and reminder/ recall system to encourage eye checks for people with diabetes in Australia.

- **Expand digital eye care provider platform and integrate data**

Oculo is a cloud-based digital platform that connects eye care providers. Through the Oculo platform, eye care and diabetes care providers can create an electronic eye e-health record and shared library of medical images including retinal photographs. A portal will enable all eye care professionals and general practitioners and diabetes healthcare professionals to share secure information with patient consent.

- **Deliver bi-annual eye checks using existing networks of eye care specialist and primary care providers**

The program will encourage people with diabetes to visit existing optometry services and specialist ophthalmic service providers for Medicare-funded eye checks and early interventions.

Who is involved?

The five-year program will involve many organisations from across the eye and diabetes sectors. The initial founding partners include:

- **Diabetes Australia**, the manager of the NDSS database and the national body for people affected by diabetes and the various state and territory diabetes organisations and the Australian Diabetes Society and Australian Diabetes Educators Association.
- **Vision 2020 Australia**, the national peak body representing around 50 member organisations involved in local and global eye health and vision care, health promotion, low vision support, vision rehabilitation, eye research, professional assistance and community support.
- **Oculo**, the only cloud-based platform in Australia connecting eye care professionals, which currently has 1900 optometrist and 500 ophthalmologist users.
- **Specsavers**, a major provider of optometric services in Australia, with 330 locations nationally and caring for over 3 million Australians every year.