

# Media Release

Date: 04.04.2014



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## Renowned Australian doctor to head International eye organisation

Eye health expert Professor Hugh Taylor AC, Melbourne Laureate Professor and the Harold Mitchell Chair of Indigenous Eye Health at the University of Melbourne has been named President of the International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO).

He is the first Australian and the first from the southern hemisphere to be appointed to this role. Professor Taylor is recognised worldwide for his leadership in trachoma, advocacy for improved Indigenous eye health and other initiatives to eliminate avoidable vision loss.

He has held numerous leadership positions, including previous Vice President for the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness and has been the ICO Director for Advocacy and is the current ICO Treasurer. Within Australia he was Professor of Ophthalmology at the University of Melbourne for 20 years and established the Centre for Eye Research Australia. He is currently Deputy Chair of the board of Vision 2020 Australia.

Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, Professor Stephen Smith congratulated Professor Taylor on his appointment.

“Professor Taylor brings with him great experience in both clinical and research work. He has been a champion of improved health outcomes for Australian Indigenous communities,” he said.

“His early experience of reviewing Pakistan’s eye care services on behalf of the World Health Organisation, led him to take up the challenge of convincing governments to take vision loss seriously and demonstrating why—with limited and competing health dollars—eye care must be made a global priority.”

Professor Taylor’s new role with the ICO comes at the same time as the most recent statistics on blindness were published in a study in the *British Journal of Ophthalmology*.

Australia has recorded a 21percent reduction in the prevalence of blindness in the last 20 years, according to *The Global Burden of Disease* study.

“These figures are encouraging as even though the world’s population increased over this time, the rates of blindness have reduced dramatically so that the actual number of people who are blind has decreased,” said Professor Taylor.

In high-income countries like Australia, the most common cause of blindness changed from cataract in 1990 to macular degeneration in 2010.

Australia has the lowest rates of blindness and vision loss than to the rest of the world and is similar to most high-income countries.

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While Australia is performing well globally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders still experience higher rates of blindness due to cataract, uncorrected refractive error, diabetic retinopathy and trachoma.

Professor Taylor warned as most of this is preventable and treatable, we need to continue to improve access to eye care and ensure that Indigenous Australians do not miss out on the essential eye care they need.

“While these figures are encouraging for the general population, the concern is that we are still not making headway with Indigenous Australians, as they continue to miss out on the eye care they need. More work needs to be done” urged Professor Taylor.

Professor Taylor takes up his two year appointment with the ICO at the 2014 World Ophthalmology Congress® on April 2-6 in Tokyo, Japan.

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