



For immediate release: Tuesday 2 March 2021

MDFA backs Royal Commission recommendation on low vision aids, calls for a national approach to support all Australians living with vision loss

Macular Disease Foundation Australia (MDFA) has welcomed the final report of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, which recommends making low vision aids and technologies more accessible for older Australians.

Everyone living with a disability in the aged-care system should receive daily living supports – such as assistive technologies, aids and equipment – at a level equivalent to what someone under the age of 65 years would receive in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), states one of the report’s 148 recommendations.

Should the Commonwealth Government adopt this recommendation, more than 100,000 older Australians living with low vision or blindness will have greater and more equitable access to low vision aids and technology that can improve their quality of life and maximise their independence.

“Assistive technology, aids and equipment can transform the lives of people with vision loss, helping them maintain their independence and continue doing the things they love to do. But many older Australians simply cannot afford this life-changing equipment,” MDFA CEO Dee Hopkins says.

“We applaud the Royal Commission for making this crucial recommendation, and we implore Health Minister Greg Hunt and Prime Minister Scott Morrison to adopt it so older Australians with vision impairment can finally get the practical support they need to improve independence and quality of life.”

While the Government is yet to select which of the report’s recommendations it will adopt, Prime Minister Morrison has already pledged \$452.2 million to address issues in the aged-care sector the commission has highlighted. The Government will provide a further response to the report in the May budget.

“Adopting the Royal Commission’s recommendations to fully integrate aids and equipment into the aged-care system would be life-changing for many older Australians living with low vision or blindness. We look forward to the Commonwealth Government’s comprehensive response in the upcoming Federal Budget,” Ms Hopkins says.

This key recommendation comes four years after MDFA and the George Institute for Global Health released *‘Low Vision, quality of life and independence: A review of the evidence on aids and*

technologies'. The report highlighted the barriers to accessing low vision aids and technology in the aged-care system as well as state and territory programs, and called for the creation of a nationally funded program.

In addition to older Australians living with vision loss in the aged-care system, there are also younger Australians, who are ineligible for the NDIS, that would greatly benefit from being able to access low vision aids and technology.

"Our 'Low Vision' report showed that, unfortunately, where you live can determine how well you can see," Ms Hopkins says.

"A national approach, with the Commonwealth Government's leadership, is needed to ensure all Australians – regardless of how old they are or where they live – are able to get the low vision aids and technology they need.

- ENDS -

About Macula Disease Foundation Australia (MDFA)

MDFA is the peak national body representing the voice of the macular disease community. It is committed to reducing the incidence and impact of macular disease, the leading cause of blindness and severe vision loss in Australia. It provides a range of information and support services via its National Helpline 1800 111 709 and online webinar series, available at www.mdfoundation.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 edema (DME). 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.

Contact MDFA

Leonie Walton, Director Marketing and Fundraising, Macular Disease Foundation Australia

Email: leonie@mdfoundation.com.au

Phone: (02) 8268 8401

National Helpline: 1800 111 709 www.mdfoundation.com.au

Are you at risk? Take the quiz: www.CheckMyMacula.com.au