

HEALTH REPORT

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FEAR OF GOING BLIND ON PAR WITH CANCER AND HEART DISEASE - NEW RESEARCH

Fear of blindness is as big a fear as developing cancer or heart disease for half the Australian population, new research released today on World Sight Day reveals.

The research, published in the Pfizer Australia Health Report and conducted in conjunction with Vision 2020 Australia, reveals that while eyesight is a top priority for Australians, many are not aware that vision loss and blindness can be prevented.

Vision 2020 Australia CEO, Jennifer Gersbeck, says that almost all blindness and vision loss can be prevented or treated.

"Around 75 per cent of vision loss is preventable or treatable. Regular eye tests are a simple way to maintain good eye health and prevent avoidable blindness or low vision," Jennifer said.

"An estimated 500,000 thousand Australians are needlessly blind or vision impaired. As a result of Australia's ageing population and the correlation between ageing and vision loss, we expect these numbers to double in the next twenty years," she added.

Around 67 percent of Australians said independence would be the aspect of life they would miss most if they lost their vision. After that it would be seeing family and friends and reading.

Over three quarters of Australians feel employment would be the most difficult aspect of life for someone with low vision. Almost two thirds feel travelling on public transport would be an issue and around one half thinks cooking or education would be a challenge.

Many member organisations of Vision 2020 Australia provide low vision and rehabilitation services to ensure people who are blind or have low vision can lead full and active lives.

"Nearly half a million Australians are blind or have low vision. Amazingly, only ten per cent access services that could make a significant difference to their health and to everyday life," Jennifer commented.

"World Sight Day aims to raise awareness about low vision and the services available. Without low vision services, activities sighted people take for granted, such as shopping, gardening, preparing meals, crossing the road and catching public transport can be difficult and dangerous. Low vision services promote



independence, are available throughout Australia, and are usually provided free of charge.”

On a positive note, 97 percent of those asked said they would seek assistance to maintain their quality of life if they experienced permanent vision loss.

Vision 2020 Australia is working to eliminate avoidable blindness and vision loss by the year 2020. Vision 2020 Australia brings together Australian organisations involved in local and global eye care services delivery, health promotion, education and development, low vision support, vision health rehabilitation, eye research, professional assistance and community support.

To assist with educating the public about vision, Vision 2020 Australia has collaborated with Pfizer Australia to produce this month’s edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report. Filled with useful information, free copies can be requested by phoning **1800 675 229** or by visiting www.healthreport.com.au where people can also sign-up for email alerts of future editions.

The findings on vision are based on responses from 1,405 Australians aged 18 years and over. The research was conducted in 2006 by independent consultants Stollznow Research.

Pfizer Australia is the nation’s leading research-based health care company, investing over \$A42m in local research and development annually. It discovers, develops, manufactures and markets innovative medical treatments for both humans and animals. For more information, visit www.pfizer.com.au.

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NB: INTERVIEWS AVAILABLE WITH JENNIFER GERSBECK, CEO OF VISION 2020 AUSTRALIA

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