



VISION 2020 New Zealand

Clear Focus Consensus Statement

Projections suggest that the number of New Zealanders with vision loss will rise by 40% from 125,000 in 2009 to almost 174,000 by 2020. The number who are blind is projected to rise from 12,000 in 2009 to more than 18,000 in 2020. Vision loss comes with a substantial cost to the individual and society, both in direct economic terms and in quality of life.

Most vision loss is correctable, preventable or treatable. By investing in prevention, the cost savings for New Zealand in the medium term would be millions of dollars.

Together with other countries, New Zealand has pledged to eliminate avoidable blindness by 2020 through the global initiative, VISION 2020: The Right to Sight. Since 2002, New Zealand has been committed to VISION 2020 ideals. In 2009 New Zealand was part of the Sixty-Second World Health Assembly that endorsed the **Action Plan for the Elimination of Avoidable Blindness and Visual Impairment**. to further advance VISION 2020 in member countries.

With less than 10 years to go for this collaborative effort, the Government and the sector need to make the elimination of avoidable blindness a priority, build on existing services and work in partnership. An action plan to minimise avoidable blindness and vision loss is needed, together with strategies to remove the barriers to full participation in the community for people with little or no sight.

Endorsers note that:

1. VISION 2020 New Zealand's Clear Focus research found that the economic costs of vision loss to government, industry and the New Zealand community are significant.

- **Vision loss cost New Zealand society \$2.8 billion in 2009**, and this figure is increasing each year. Without further investment, direct health costs alone are projected to more than double to \$523 million by 2020, compared with \$198 million in 2009.
- Most vision loss is **correctable, preventable or treatable**. By investing in prevention, the cost savings for New Zealand in the medium term would be millions of dollars.
- The **Māori population is disproportionately affected** by vision loss - for example, the overall prevalence of vision impairment and blindness in Māori aged 45-74 years is twice that of non-Māori.

- **Loss of wellbeing** due to vision loss was estimated to cost the New Zealand economy \$2.4 billion in 2009.
- **These costs are not inevitable.** Low vision and blindness rehabilitation services are central to improving quality of life, access to education and employment and reducing barriers to full participation within the community.

2. New Zealand's Government has committed to reducing the impact of sight loss, but there is still work to be done.

- New Zealand has ratified the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, which commits the Government to ensuring people with sight loss enjoy the same rights as others in employment, education and other areas of life, evidenced in New Zealand's domestic and international foreign aid policies.
- Since 2002, the New Zealand Government has repeatedly supported the World Health Organization's goal for eliminating avoidable blindness by 2020 through World Health Assembly resolutions.
- In 2002, The New Zealand Government signed the 'VISION 2020 New Zealand' Charter - a "Global Declaration of Support".
- New Zealand supported World Health Assembly (WHA) Resolution WHA56.26 (2003), which urged member states to **develop a national VISION 2020 plan** for eliminating avoidable blindness by the year 2020, and to commence implementation of their plan by 2007 at the latest.
- In 2009, New Zealand was part of the Sixty-Second World Health Assembly that endorsed the **Action Plan for the Elimination of Avoidable Blindness and Visual Impairment**. The Action Plan calls for member states to "**develop and strengthen national policies, plans and programmes** for eye health and prevention of blindness and visual impairment." It highlights the need for epidemiological research, cross-sector collaboration and integration of eye health within broader health and socioeconomic development programmes.
- New Zealand is **one of the only developed countries** in the world that does not have a national plan and budget for the prevention of vision loss.
- With **less than ten years to go until 2020**, a focused effort is needed to eliminate avoidable blindness and vision loss and ensure that blindness and vision impairment are no longer barriers to full participation in the community.

Endorsers resolve that:

- **Political commitment** is essential to eliminate avoidable blindness. New Zealand's commitment to eliminating avoidable blindness needs to be supported by Government, all political parties, the Ministry of Health, all 20 District Health Boards and the private sector.
- **A ten year comprehensive eye health strategy** should be developed with measurable targets for reduction and elimination of vision loss. This will enable New Zealand to meet the goals outlined in WHA's Action Plan for the Prevention of Avoidable Blindness and Visual Impairment. The socio-economic consequences of blindness and vision loss outlined in the Clear Focus research justify active monitoring and refinement of interventions.
- **Eye health factors should be included in District Health Board targets.** Sight loss has significant effects on health and wellbeing. Eye health and public awareness should be included as new Targets, or included within related Targets (such as "better help for smokers to quit" and "better diabetes services"). This would raise awareness of vision as part of overall health.
- **Epidemiological data on population eye health** should be collected to guide policy development. In particular, there are significant gaps in knowledge related to vision loss in the Māori and Pacific populations. More understanding is needed about the complexities that lie behind high prevalence rates of vision loss among Māori and barriers to early detection and treatment.
- **Better integration of eye health care with primary health care, chronic disease management and rehabilitation providers is needed,** particularly for those with diabetes-related eye conditions. Education of general medical practitioners, nurses and allied healthcare professionals would aid detection of vision loss and speed appropriate referral.
- **Equity of access to eye care** should be investigated, including services for early detection, treatment and correction. Access in rural communities and in Māori, Pacific, and other high needs populations is of particular concern.
- **An evidence base needs to be established specific to New Zealand** against which progress in fighting blindness can be monitored. Appropriate forms of correcting refractive error can address up to 55% of impaired vision.
- **Stronger partnerships and collaboration among all stakeholders** are needed, including eye health professionals, low vision services, rehabilitation providers, employers, technology providers, the welfare system and the blind community.

Clear Focus Endorsement (organisation)

My organisation supports VISION 2020 New Zealand's Clear Focus campaign for a national eye health strategy to eliminate preventable blindness in New Zealand, and endorses the campaign's consensus statement.

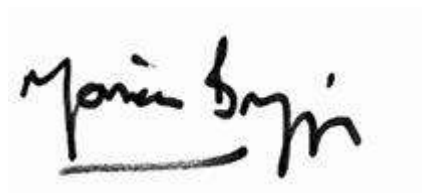
VISION 2020 New Zealand may acknowledge our support on their website, at events and political and sector briefing meetings. VISION 2020 New Zealand may add our organisation to their mailing list to keep us up to date with campaign activities and provide briefings on further opportunities to become involved.

I give permission for VISION 2020 New Zealand to use our logo on their website, in any publication and in display materials to indicate endorsement of the campaign in the next 24 months.

Signed by

Name: Monica Briggs

Title/Role: President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Monica Briggs". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

On behalf of **Public Health Association of New Zealand:**

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