

Introduction

The National Framework for Action to Promote Eye Health and Prevent Avoidable Blindness and Vision Loss

In July 2004, the Australian Health Ministers' Conference (now Standing Committee on Health) agreed on the need to develop a National Eye Health Plan to promote eye health and reduce the incidence of avoidable blindness. This initiative responded to the World Health Assembly resolution WHA56.26 on the elimination of avoidable blindness in member countries.

In November 2005, Health Ministers endorsed *The National Framework for Action to Promote Eye Health and Prevent Avoidable Blindness and Vision Loss* (the National Framework). The National Framework provides a blueprint for nationally coordinated action by governments, non government organisations, health professionals, industry and individuals.

The intent of the National Framework is to address the underlying issues that were common to the prevention and treatment of eye disease and vision loss in general rather than to focus on any one specific eye condition. The overarching goal is 'to promote eye health and reduce the incidence of avoidable blindness and vision loss in Australia'.

To this end, the National Framework encompassed the five key action areas and objectives set out below in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

NATIONAL EYE HEALTH FRAMEWORK: KEY ACTION AREAS AND OBJECTIVES

Key Action Area	Objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reducing the risk of eye disease and injury	<i>Eye disease and vision loss are prevented, where possible, through addressing known modifiable risk factors</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increasing early detection	<i>Treatable eye conditions are detected early, so that interventions can be applied to preserve vision and prevent any further vision loss</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improving access to eye health care services	<i>All Australians have equitable access to appropriate eye health care when required</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improving the systems and quality of care	<i>Eye health care is safe, affordable, well coordinated, consumer-focussed and consistent with internationally recognised good practice</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improving the underlying evidence base	<i>Eye health care policy, planning and programs are supported by high quality research and data collection systems</i>

Source: Commonwealth of Australia 2005

The National Framework is designed to complement the existing eye health activities of governments¹, non government organisations and the private sector. In addition, it was envisaged that actions would be strengthened and extended through strategic partnerships and linked to relevant national strategies. The principles that guided the development of the National Framework emphasised the need for actions that, among other things, should:

- be consumer oriented;
- focus on high risk groups;
- focus on primary prevention;
- take a life course approach;
- be based on evidence or current knowledge and experience;
- foster partnerships; and
- leverage from national and state based public health strategies and initiatives (for example, chronic disease, population ageing). (Commonwealth of Australia 2005)

Implementation of the National Framework was the responsibility of all key stakeholders working in collaboration.

National reporting requirements

In accordance with reporting requirements under the National Framework, the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, through their respective health departments, are required to report three yearly to the Australian Health Ministers' Conference (now the Standing Committee on Health) on progress made under the National Framework.

¹ Notably public hospital service provision including medical, surgical and consultation services in admitted and non admitted patient settings as well as training provided for ophthalmologists and orthoptists.