

Question on Notice
No. 157
Asked on 8 March 2011

MR FOLEY asked the Minister for Health (MR WILSON)-

QUESTION:

As the Queensland State Government support for people suffering macular degeneration is not as generous as those in other Australian states, will the department consider boosting this support for sufferers of this disease throughout Queensland?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for Maryborough for his question.

The Bligh Government provides a total of more than \$1.5 million a year to Guide Dogs Queensland, Vision Australia and other ophthalmic organisations to provide specialist services to vision-impaired Queenslanders. Additionally, the Government contributed \$10 million towards a new headquarters for Vision Australia in Coorparoo on Brisbane's south side which opened on Wednesday 25 August 2010.

The new facility includes a low-vision clinic, a children's assessment centre with therapy and parent support, a kitchen for life skills training, a seeing eye dog run, and an assisted industrial facility for employment enterprises.

The primary role of Queensland Health is the provision of public health services throughout the state. Integrated within many of these strategies is the delivery of eye services such as:

- the Queensland Strategy for Chronic Disease 2005-2015 advocating the early identification and prevention of age related macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy;
- the Statewide Action Plan: Falls Prevention in Older People which recognises poor vision as a major risk to injury and debilitation;
- the Sunsafes Strategy which promotes the use of sunglasses as a way of preventing or reducing eye damage; and
- the Queensland Spectacle Supply Scheme (QSSS) assists eligible Queensland residents by providing a comprehensive range of free basic prescription spectacles. Queensland Health administers the scheme through public hospitals and community health services and on an average, approximately 80,000 pairs of spectacles are provided annually under the QSSS at an overall cost of more than \$6 million.

Significant resources are also being invested to improve access and reduce waiting lists for ophthalmic patients in the domains of specialist outpatient and elective surgical services. An example of such an initiative is the Surgery Connect Program which is a Queensland Health initiative, which exists as a safety net for elective surgery patients who have been waiting over the clinically recommended timeframe for their surgery.

Within this program patients from the Specialist Outpatient and Elective Surgery domains have accessed care through optimisation of capacity internally and also external investment through outsourcing with the private sector.

Since the inception of the program, 1 November 2007 to 1 January 2011, over 8,000 procedures including cataract extraction, pterygium, corneal graft and retinal detachment repairs have been provided.