



## World Glaucoma Month – Amplifying awareness



*Written by Glaucoma Australia*

World Glaucoma Awareness Month, observed every March, is a global initiative aimed at raising awareness about glaucoma and encouraging people to take proactive steps to preserve their vision. This annual observance unites eye health professionals, organizations, and communities worldwide in an effort to educate individuals about the importance of early detection and treatment, helping to prevent irreversible blindness.

Throughout the month, various awareness campaigns and initiatives take place, including free eye screenings, public talks and webinars. Prominent landmarks around the world are

illuminated in green, the official color of glaucoma awareness, to emphasize the urgency of early detection. Additionally, social media campaigns play a significant role in spreading the message, utilizing hashtags like #WorldGlaucomaWeek to engage a wider audience and spread the word.

### Understanding glaucoma

**Glaucoma is one of the leading causes of irreversible blindness worldwide** and is often referred to as “the sneak thief of sight.” It typically has no early symptoms, making it difficult for individuals to recognize the disease until significant vision loss has occurred.

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# From the CEO



Dear friends and supporters,

It is a privilege to share with you the latest in glaucoma news through our April edition, not least of which was the

incredible announcement by The Snow Foundation to commit \$50M over the next decade to accelerate glaucoma research.

During World Glaucoma Week, 3 amazing advocates presented our special Live Q&A series, proudly sponsored by our friends at Glaukos. Channel 7 newsreader and Glaucoma Australia Ambassador, Mike Amor, shared his journey living with glaucoma, Pharmacist Khanh Nguyen spoke about glaucoma and its side effects, while Ophthalmologist and healthy lifestyle advocate, Dr Brian Ang, discussed 'going beyond eye pressure'. Don't worry if you missed them though as you can play them back on our You Tube channel.

I hope you enjoy this issue's articles, some written by our SiGHTWiSE patient educators, on how we deliver tailored services and the emotional and informational challenges of a glaucoma diagnosis.

As always, a special thanks to our very generous donors and supporters. We have been delivering education and support services for almost 40 years and plan to continue that for the next 40!

Sincerely,

**Adam Check**  
Chief Executive Officer

## Cover Story

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*Continued from page 1*

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), as of August 2023, an estimated 7.7 million people worldwide are affected by glaucoma, and this number is projected to increase to 112 million by 2040 due to the aging global population. Given these alarming statistics, **regular eye examinations, early detection, and timely treatment are essential to mitigate the risk of vision loss.**

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that cause damage to the optic nerve, often due to increased intraocular pressure (IOP). This progressive damage can lead to blindness if left untreated. The two most common types of glaucoma are *open angle glaucoma*, the most prevalent form, which develops gradually and presents no early symptoms and *angle-closure glaucoma*, a more sudden and severe condition that can cause intense pain and rapid vision loss, requiring immediate medical attention.

Other types include congenital glaucoma, which is present at birth, and secondary glaucoma, which results from underlying health conditions or the use of certain medications.

#### Risk factors and prevention

While glaucoma can affect anyone, certain groups are at a higher risk of developing the disease. These include individuals over the age of 40, people with a family history of glaucoma, individuals of African, Asian, or Hispanic descent, long-term steroid users and people with conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or extreme nearsightedness

Although glaucoma has no cure, it can be managed effectively through medications, laser treatments, or surgery.

To lower the risk of developing glaucoma, individuals should adopt the following preventive measures:

- Regular eye examinations: routine check-ups help detect glaucoma in its early stages, allowing for timely intervention.
- Healthy lifestyle choices: a balanced diet rich in antioxidants, regular exercise, and adequate hydration contribute to eye health.
- Managing underlying health conditions: conditions like diabetes and hypertension should be controlled to prevent complications that may contribute to glaucoma.
- Avoiding harmful habits: smoking and excessive alcohol consumption can increase the risk of glaucoma and other eye diseases.

#### The role of World Glaucoma Awareness Month

World Glaucoma Awareness Month plays a crucial role in preventing blindness and protecting vision on a global scale.

Public health campaigns, medical advancements, and individual efforts all contribute to a greater understanding of this disease, saving millions from the devastating effects of untreated glaucoma.

With the continued efforts of healthcare professionals, researchers, and advocacy groups, more individuals are becoming aware of the risks and taking proactive steps to protect their vision.

Increased funding for research has led to the development of advanced diagnostic tools and improved treatment options, making early detection more effective than ever.

Educational programs and public health initiatives play a crucial role in ensuring that even individuals in remote or underserved areas have access to essential eye care services.

Advocacy groups are also instrumental in shaping healthcare policies, pushing for increased funding for vision health programs, and ensuring that eye care services are integrated into national healthcare systems.

By engaging with policymakers, medical professionals, and the public, these organizations help raise awareness about glaucoma and encourage proactive eye health management.

By working together, healthcare professionals, advocacy groups, and policymakers create a collective force that drives meaningful change in the fight against glaucoma.

These collaborative efforts contribute to a future where preventable blindness caused by glaucoma is significantly reduced, improving the quality of life for millions of people worldwide.

**World Glaucoma Awareness Month serves as a critical reminder that vision health should never be taken for granted. ●**



# Snow vision accelerator: \$50m glaucoma investment



L-R: Professor Jean Yang, Glaucoma Australia President Maree O'Brien, Tom Snow, Professor Jonathan Crowston, Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Mark Scott AO and Dr Katharina Bell.

Written by Mivision

A “transformative” AU\$50 million philanthropic gift will see a partnership between the Snow Medical Research Foundation and the University of Sydney launch the Snow Vision Accelerator programme, aimed at developing novel therapies for glaucoma.

**The Snow Vision Accelerator programme will build on the work of world-renowned ophthalmologist Professor Jonathan Crowston.**

It will bring together leading Australian and international research groups to develop innovative treatments that enhance the ability of optic nerve cells to withstand injury and survive, addressing a pressing unmet need for effective therapies.

The funding commitment by the Snow family is the single largest philanthropic investment in vision science in Australia.

Terry Snow AM, who died last year, was an Australian businessman, entrepreneur, and philanthropist based in Canberra.

Together with his brother, George Snow, he set up the philanthropic Snow Foundation in

**Backing High-Risk, High-Reward Projects**

Glaucoma affects 80 million people globally,<sup>1</sup> including over 380,000 Australians.<sup>2</sup>

Often referred to as the ‘sneak thief of sight’, people can irreversibly lose significant peripheral vision before they are even aware that they have glaucoma.

Current treatments focus solely on lowering intraocular pressure (IOP) leaving age-related vulnerabilities and optic nerve resilience largely unaddressed.

Chair of the Snow Medical Research Foundation, Tom Snow, described the philanthropic venture as a “transformative investment in ophthalmology in Australia, and one of the largest worldwide”.

He said the programme, designed in partnership with the University of Sydney, aimed to “**revolutionise how we treat glaucoma and prevent blindness for millions of people worldwide.** Our family backs high-risk, high-reward science that addresses the most pressing global health challenges.

This builds on Terry Snow’s vision to deliver real-world solutions at an accelerated pace by backing world-class researchers here in Australia.

This is about doing philanthropy differently – by giving the long-term stability and resources to the best teams needed to translate research to the bedside.

It is a commitment to excellence, global collaboration, urgency and intellectual vitality,” Mr Snow said.

**A Commitment to Making A Difference**

University of Sydney Vice-Chancellor Professor Mark Scott extended his “heartfelt thanks to the Snow family and Snow Medical Research Foundation for enabling this innovative research and commercialisation.”

“Built on the outstanding research skills and knowledge of the world-renowned ophthalmologist Professor Jonathan Crowston and his team at the University, this partnership in the Snow Vision Accelerator shares our deep commitment to outstanding scientific endeavour and to making a tangible difference to the millions of people affected by glaucoma.

**“Together we’ll work to create a future free from its tenacious grip,” Prof Scott said.**

Prof Crowston emphasised the significance of this program.

“This Accelerator will address a critical gap in glaucoma research, targeting the age-related vulnerabilities of the optic nerve. With this

funding, we can explore transformative therapies that aim to prevent vision loss by stopping the disease from progressing,” he said.

“This programme is game-changing because it addresses the unmet need for drugs that increase nerve resilience, a field where such treatments currently do not exist. Its unique scale and focus integrate teams across biological research, data science, drug development, and clinical trials, all working towards a common product-oriented goal.”

In addition to advancing drug development, the programme aims to build Australia’s reputation as a global leader in eye research and to attract additional funding from government, philanthropy, and the private sector.

Ophthalmologist Professor Ian Constable AO, a key advisor for the Snow Vision Accelerator said he was thrilled with the new programme.

“This partnership between the University of Sydney and the Snow Medical Research Foundation is an innovative model for philanthropy that will drive tangible outcomes for people experiencing glaucoma.

We see a future with both outstanding scientific breakthroughs and efficient clinical translation,” Prof Constable said.

The programme will begin in July this year. ●

**References**

- The University of Sydney, Snow family’s \$50m partnership to transform glaucoma treatment (media release, 17 Feb 2025), available at: [sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2025/02/17/snow-family-50m-partnership-to-transform-glaucoma-treatment.html](https://sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2025/02/17/snow-family-50m-partnership-to-transform-glaucoma-treatment.html) [accessed Feb 2025].
- Evaluate, Evaluate economic impact report commissioned by Glaucoma Australia, 28 March 2023.

# Outside the consulting room

Written by Valerie Tosswill and Natasha Sikman

Whether a patient is advised that they are a glaucoma suspect, or confirmed to have glaucoma, an appointment with an optometrist or an ophthalmologist can be overwhelming. But what happens after they leave your practice?

Receiving a glaucoma diagnosis or learning about the progression of this vision-threatening condition can provide clarity but often brings confusion and distress along with emotional and practical challenges. Patients often face an array of decisions and potential lifestyle changes. **The nature of follow-up conversations can grow increasingly complex as the disease progresses, reflecting ever evolving challenges including mental health and financial distress.**

After the consultation, patients may leave the clinic with many questions and uncertainties. Those newly diagnosed with early-stages of glaucoma may feel a mixture of anxiety and relief – relief that the disease has been caught early, and anxiety around what lies ahead. Patients with more advanced stages may have different concerns, such as the need for immediate treatment or grappling with a reduction in vision.

## INFORMATION GAP

Although the optometrist or ophthalmologist may have provided detailed guidance on treatment options, understanding the information and instructions in one session is challenging, particularly if there is an element of underlying anxiety. Explanations concerning prescribed eye drops, lifestyle adjustments, and surgical interventions can be time limited for

the clinical eye care team, particularly with a diagnosis that involves complex terminology and potential long-term consequences.

Often, what the optometrist or an ophthalmologist has said differs from what the patient hears, and the patient leaves the clinic with a cloud of questions: “What was I told? I am not sure what the laser involves? How long do I need to use the drops for?” and the list goes on.

These scenarios are commonly reported to our orthoptist patient educators. We are often told that there is limited explanation of why the in-clinic tests need to be done. Also, many do not understand why the tests need to be repeated with the ophthalmologist after they have already been performed by the optometrist.

Glaucoma affects 2.3% of the population aged 55 years or older (approx. 180,000 older Australians).<sup>1</sup> This older age group often finds it harder to travel to appointments, feels more isolated, and is more reliant on others to assist them in their glaucoma journey. Glaucoma certainly underscores a person’s decreasing independence.

The reality is, after the initial consultation, much of the work in managing glaucoma falls on the patient. This can feel daunting, especially as glaucoma is a progressive condition that requires constant monitoring and adherence to treatment to preserve sight. For some, new questions and uncertainties may arise within hours or days of the appointment, such as how to best manage their eye drop regimen, potential side effects of medications, treatment options or how the condition may impact daily activities.

Patients may also struggle to understand how their specific form of glaucoma might progress and often turn to ‘Dr Google’ for answers. Even with educational pamphlets and online resources, we often find that the patients seek more personalised, accessible support as they adjust to the lifestyle changes required to manage their condition.

## A SAFE SPACE

Glaucoma Australia’s support platforms play a critical role in bridging the gap between eye appointments. We offer patients a safe space to ask questions, express concerns, and learn from the experience of others. Mental health, financial aspects, confusion surrounding treatments, and independence underpin many of the support calls that we receive on a daily basis.

A recent snapshot of calls to Glaucoma Australia (July 2024) showed that support calls can last for up to an hour and a half, and almost 50% of calls are not directly related to glaucoma and its treatment, but to a range of other issues.

Over one third of people occasionally experienced anxiety around their glaucoma, a further 20% were frequently anxious, and 40% of people requested a support call from Glaucoma Australia within a month. These statistics highlight the impact of glaucoma, not only on the eyes, but on the person as a whole.



Clinical practitioners do not have the ‘luxury of time’ in the consulting room to answer all their patient’s questions and allay their concerns and fears, while patients often do not feel comfortable ringing back to ask.

**Glaucoma Australia fills this gap with experienced clinical orthoptists who hold a broad knowledge of glaucoma** and its treatment options, an understanding of mental health impacts and an awareness of third-party support services – and they are not time limited.

As glaucoma progresses, the questions become more detailed and, at times, much more complex, for example:

- I want someone to listen and understand how I am feeling; I am going blind; I am anxious; I feel depressed; I feel very uncertain.
- I was prescribed glaucoma drops at night. I have not started using them as I am unsure.
- I am booked to have selective laser trabeculoplasty (SLT) in two hours – should I go through with it?
- They changed my drops, and I cannot manage the new bottle – I am traumatised. Can you help?
- What supplements/dietary changes will benefit my glaucoma?
- My eyes are red and painful with drops – what should I do (to help)?
- Are there any exercises that I can do to control my glaucoma?
- I had to give up my driver’s licence and I feel very isolated. I have no support from my family. Is there anyone in my local area I could meet with for a cuppa?
- I am going travelling. How can I store my drops? Will travelling on a plane increase my eye pressure?



**Glaucoma Australia educates patients through a variety of accessible resources and programs designed to increase understanding and support management of the condition.**

We provide detailed information through online resources, such as articles, videos, live webinars, and downloadable guides covering topics from diagnosis and treatment options to lifestyle tips.

Through our SiGHTWiSE patient support program, our team of orthoptist patient educators offer one-on-one tailored support, answering questions and explaining medical procedures, tests, and treatment plans as an extension of the care given by the clinician.

**INFORMATION AT THE RIGHT TIME**

The Sightwise program takes a phased approach, so that the information relayed to patients is relevant to the stage of their glaucoma journey:

- Stage 1 = Suspect diagnosis (new suspect): Explore diagnosis response; provide basic information; promote ophthalmology appointment; provide referral resource.
- Stage 2 = Establish treatment/recent diagnosis (first three months of diagnosis): Discuss treatment plan; provide education, resources, and support; discuss ongoing appointment and treatment requirements; provide referral resource.
- Stage 3 = Adherence and family (six months post diagnosis): Review adherence to treatment plan; identify reasons for nonadherence; educate to improve adherence; encourage relatives to get tested.

- Stage 4 = Living with glaucoma (12 months post diagnosis): Grow knowledge and confidence in eye health management; promote appointment adherence; promote treatment adherence; educate and support change management.

Glaucoma Australia offers avenues for patients to connect, both online and in-person, to reduce confusion and isolation, and facilitate support. Patients can share stories and ask questions from those who truly understand what they are going through. We also connect patients with mentors who provide encouragement and real-life insight into actively living with glaucoma.

Additionally, we strongly encourage patients with glaucoma to inform their family members about the importance of getting tested. As glaucoma can be hereditary, direct family members, i.e. siblings, parents, and children, are 10 times more likely to develop glaucoma.

By encouraging families to get tested, we aim to promote early detection, which is crucial in preventing vision loss.

Our recent patient reported outcome measures (PROM) (July 2024) for SiGHTWiSE demonstrated the effectiveness of the program:

- 92% attended their recommended glaucoma appointments (care provider compliance),
- 82% of participants adhered to their prescribed medications, versus 50% of nonparticipants (treatment compliance),
- 50% reduction in level of anxiety/wellbeing/support (mental health), and

- Knowledge of glaucoma and how it is treated increased from 37% to 53% after receiving education and support, rating their knowledge as 'above average' or 'excellent' (knowledge and understanding).

**BUILDING THE JIGSAW**

Ongoing monitoring for glaucoma is key – optometrists are well-placed to undertake regular screening, detection, and early referral for ophthalmic co-management if there is suspicion of glaucoma or detection of glaucoma progression. Glaucoma Australia's SiGHTWiSE program is supported by early career optometrists and Masters of Orthoptics students and plays an active and vital role in supporting patients, promoting early detection, and improving patient outcomes.



Glaucoma can be a difficult condition to manage, and its mental, emotional, and financial toll should not be underestimated.

Conversations with glaucoma patients require sensitivity, and there is an increasing reliance on support groups to extend clinical care and fill the gap in-between optometry and ophthalmology appointments.

Glaucoma management is a jigsaw – the pieces of medical care, treatment, and support, must be joined together to maintain a status quo for our patients.

By taking a holistic, collaborative approach to patient support, patients report that they feel much better equipped to navigate their glaucoma journey.

If you or a loved one requires information or support, reach out on our free support line on 1800 500 880 (Monday – Friday AEDT). ●

**References:**

1. National Rural Health Alliance, *Eye and vision health in rural Australia, fact sheet*, available at: [ruralhealth.org.au/sites/default/files/publications/nrha-eye-and-vision-healthfactsheet-final.pdf](https://ruralhealth.org.au/sites/default/files/publications/nrha-eye-and-vision-healthfactsheet-final.pdf) [accessed Dec 2024].
2. Glaucoma Australia Impact Survey July 2024.

# My Glaucoma Story

## Fiona's Story

My own journey with glaucoma is deeply intertwined with my mother's. As a child, Rosemary was a staunch advocate for glaucoma awareness, ensuring I was checked regularly from a young age. Her vigilance led to the early discovery and successful treatment of my lazy eye when I was six, preventing further.

At 28, in 2001, I received the unexpected diagnosis of being a glaucoma suspect. Thanks to my mother's proactive approach and guidance, I was prepared for this news. Treatment began with nightly eye drops, and in 2009, after it was discovered that my condition had a closed-angle component, I underwent my first laser treatment. Unfortunately, a mix-up with my medication at the pharmacy led to blurred vision and elevated eye pressure.

In 2019, I underwent successful Minimally Invasive Glaucoma Surgery (MIGS) in both eyes. Last year, I received Soft Laser Therapy (SLT), which ultimately freed me from the need for daily eye drops. This was an especially encouraging milestone, as my husband, Frank, was diagnosed with glaucoma in 2017 and has also benefited from SLT, no longer requiring medication. To date, neither Frank nor I have experienced any functional vision loss.

My mother's unwavering strength and determination have profoundly shaped my own approach to glaucoma. Today, I remain dedicated to advocating for glaucoma awareness, ensuring that my family and community are vigilant about eye health. ●

*If you wish to share your glaucoma journey visit [www.glaucoma.org.au/share-your-story](http://www.glaucoma.org.au/share-your-story) OR email your story and a photo (optional) to [glaucoma@glaucoma.org.au](mailto:glaucoma@glaucoma.org.au)*



## Let's get SiGHTWiSE

Glaucoma Australia's SiGHTWiSE patient support program offers FREE education, guidance and support to people living with glaucoma.

If you or someone you care for has been diagnosed with glaucoma, join our supportive community, and enjoy the sight-saving benefits of being SiGHTWiSE.

### Enrol today

[www.glaucoma.org.au/sightwise](http://www.glaucoma.org.au/sightwise)

**Call our free support line**  
1800 500 880

### Contact details

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E: [glaucoma@glaucoma.org.au](mailto:glaucoma@glaucoma.org.au)  
W: [glaucoma.org.au](http://glaucoma.org.au)



# Your Questions Answered



## Live Q & A with Dr Noor Ali - Pregnancy and Glaucoma.

Dr Ali is an ophthalmologist who specialises in glaucoma and cataract surgery. Dr Ali is highly proficient and precise in cataract surgery, glaucoma management and all forms of glaucoma surgery including minimally invasive and traditional procedures.

**Q Can glaucoma be passed down genetically to my baby?**

**A** We know that glaucoma has a genetic component, and there is clustering in families. However, there is not a direct inheritance. We cannot really say what your baby's risk of getting glaucoma is, but we do know that patients who have one family member with glaucoma, have a tenfold chance of getting glaucoma in their lifetime, compared to any other person.

Typically, what we recommend is that relatives, particularly children of people with glaucoma get screened 10 years earlier than when their relative was diagnosed. So, if you are pregnant, you were diagnosed with glaucoma at 35, we recommend that your child gets screened from 25 onwards.

**Q What tests are best to perform during pregnancy to detect glaucoma?**

**A** Fortunately, all tests that detect glaucoma are non-invasive. So, we can do a full comprehensive assessment to detect glaucoma without any fear.

When we first assess a patient for glaucoma we collect 12 pieces of information. Some of these are questions "who in your family has glaucoma" etc and some are just measurements of the eye including your intraocular pressure which are safe and have no effect on the baby.

We look at the thickness at the front of the eye to corroborate that with your pressure, because the thickness can play into it and artificially bring up or down the pressure. We also look at the drainage system and conduct more traditional and important tests such as an OCT and visual field tests.

In summary you can perform all necessary tests to detect glaucoma during pregnancy.

**Q What are your recommendations when it comes to alternative or natural therapies?**

**A** They are not a replacement. If your obstetrician has said that acupuncture is ok, it may be good for you to reduce stress or anxiety, but it is not an alternative for lowering pressure.

Vitamins play a great role in nerve protection over longer periods of time. The two main vitamins that come to mind are vitamin B3 as well as ginkgo biloba. Both have proved to have a neuro supportive effect to the optic nerve in glaucoma. However, you would still need to speak with your obstetrician to see if it is right for you and your particular condition because all pregnancies are different.

So, I would say if it's a therapy that is not going to affect the baby in any way and help you manage stress and anxiety then that is fine - but remember it is not a replacement for traditional therapies. ●



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We rely on the generosity of our corporate partners & donors to continue to fund our critical services. Your support is greatly appreciated.



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## Bequests

We respectfully accepted the kind legacy gifts of:

The Estate of the Late Jane Rosemary Robertson

The Estate of the Late Margaret Alison Gray

## Leave a lasting legacy

Leaving a gift in your Will is an incredibly forward-thinking way of giving that will benefit glaucoma patients for generations to come – your family, friends and neighbours who may be diagnosed in the future.

After looking after your loved ones, any gift is greatly appreciated and allows us to plan ahead, to invest in the research that will one day find a cure and continue to support and care for families impacted by glaucoma.

If you are considering leaving a gift in your Will to Glaucoma Australia, you can reach out to our Fundraising Manager for a confidential conversation on 1800 500 880 or via email at [betty@glaucoma.org.au](mailto:betty@glaucoma.org.au).

