

Glaucoma report points to increased costs

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A new Centre for Eye Research Australia/ Access Economics report shows the cost of glaucoma will more than double in the next two decades.

'Tunnel Vision: the Economic Impact of Primary Open Angle Glaucoma', shows associated healthcare costs totaled \$1.9 billion in 2005 and costs are expected to climb to \$4.3 billion per annum by 2025, if no changes are made to current practices.

Glaucoma damages the optic nerve, connecting the brain to the eyes, and is the world's leading cause of irreversible blindness. Current treatments can slow the progression of the disease but cannot reverse the damage caused.

The report recommends:

- A public health awareness campaign to help increase in the rate of diagnosis by people at higher risk of glaucoma (especially family history) and educating eye care practitioners;
- An up-to-date study to compare effectiveness of initial laser treatment with glaucoma medication;
- The development of new treatments that can further reduce glaucoma progression rates by 50% over and above current therapy.

Professor Jonathan Crowston, head of Centre for Eye Research

Australia's Glaucoma Research Unit, said about 300,000 Australians have glaucoma yet half of these are unaware they have a potentially blinding condition. As Australians live longer, the number of people developing glaucoma is increasing. Around 1 in 10 people over the age of 80 has glaucoma.

"There is good evidence to suggest that glaucoma runs in families and for that reason we strongly recommend people to see an eye care specialist if family members have been diagnosed with glaucoma," Professor Crowston said. In general people over the age of 40 should have their eyes checked at least every two years.

Among a number of studies, the Glaucoma Research Unit is investigating what makes older optic nerve cells more prone to damage, in order to identify therapeutic targets to protect vision.

Source: Research Australia

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