

Access to eye care in an underserved Auckland suburb

What do the people think?

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Plain language Summary

Inequities in eye health

Throughout the world, services systematically underserve some groups of people which leads to worse eye health.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Ministry of Health has committed to addressing health inequities that are experienced by Māori, Pacific people, and people living in areas with high levels of deprivation. However, this remains a work in progress. For example, New Zealand has very little public funding for eye care services, meaning that eye care is less accessible for people who are unable to pay.

Very little evidence is available describing access to eye care in New Zealand. We need this evidence so that we know how to develop services that are more accessible to everyone.



Key messages

Limited evidence exists to describe access to eye care in New Zealand.

This research has identified two major barriers that make eye health services inaccessible for some people in Aotearoa: the cost, and the lack of nearby services or transport options to reach these services.

Why did we do this research?

We did this research to better understand the reasons that New Zealand's eye care services may be difficult to use (the barriers), and ways that services may be made easier to use (the enablers), from the perspective of people who have been historically underserved.

What did we do?

We interviewed 25 people with vision problems about their opinions and experiences using eye care services. The participants all lived in an Auckland suburb that has a high level of social and economic deprivation, and most were Pacific Peoples or Māori.

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What did we find?

Barriers to eye care:

Most participants reported that the **cost** of eye care services prevented them from accessing care. Many people had to prioritise other essential costs before eye care. To overcome the cost, some had used a government loan to purchase spectacles, or purchased low-cost, premade reading glasses. Participants expressed the opinion that the government should do more to fund eye care.

The **distance to services and lack of transport** were other commonly reported reasons participants found it difficult to reach eye care services.

Enablers to eye care:

Participants were aware that good eye health is important. Some participants **chose to see their GP** for eye care advice. Some reported using optometry services in the past and described the experience positively.

While many participants were unaware of optometry services, they were interested to understand what was involved in an eye examination.

The participants also expressed how **whānau (family) play an important role** in their eye care.