

Through the looking glass: ideas to improve access to spectacles in the Western Pacific

A closer look at Australasia

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Plain language Summary

About refractive error services

Throughout the world, the most common cause of impaired vision is uncorrected refractive error – a condition where the eye cannot focus light correctly, leading to blurry eyesight.

Refractive error can (usually) be corrected with spectacles or contact lenses. However, even in countries where spectacles are readily available, they are often unaffordable for some population groups.

Improving access to spectacles is one of the most effective ways that a country can reduce the number of people experiencing impaired vision.

Why did we do this research?

We conducted this research to identify different ways that countries in the Western Pacific could improve access to spectacles.



Key messages

Countries concerned with eye health should consider strategies to improve access to spectacles.

In Australia and New Zealand, eye health experts identified Indigenous people as the population group to be prioritised in efforts to improve access to refractive error services.

Reducing out-of-pocket costs via public funding for refractive error correction was the most promising strategy identified by these experts to improve access.

What did we do?

This study gathered opinions from eye care experts in 17 countries within the Western Pacific region.

Experts provided their opinions on the population groups who faced the most barriers to refractive error services, and the strategies they believed would be more effective to provide these services.

The experts provided multiple rounds of feedback to prioritise the important strategies in each region.

What did we find in Australasia?

Of the 75 experts, 15 were from Australia or New Zealand. Many of the population groups and strategies identified by these experts were unique to this region.

Australasian experts identified **Indigenous people** as the population group to whom services were least accessible.

Reducing out-of-pocket costs by providing publicly funded services to certain population groups (e.g. elderly, low-income groups, and children) was the most promising strategy to improve access to eye examinations or spectacles.

Other strategies to improve access to **eye examinations** included:

- Improving **cultural safety** of the services so that people feel comfortable using the service.
- Establishing **refractive services in regions where they are most needed**, and incentivising optometrists to work there.

Other strategies to improve access to **spectacles** included:

- **Health promotion** to raise awareness and acceptance of spectacle wear.
- using readymade spectacles where suitable (alongside messaging about the importance of regular eye checks).
- **Regular screening** of adults who are likely to need near vision correction (~>40 years), e.g. during medical examinations in the workplace.

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