

Glaucoma New Zealand's Annual Awareness Appeal

Get behind our **B.I.G Campaign**

July is Glaucoma Awareness Month, and this year it will be bigger than ever.

Glaucoma NZ is organising a **B.I.G (Beat Invisible Glaucoma) breakfast** to take place in downtown Auckland on 8 July. **MasterChef winners** including *Brett McGregor* and *Aaron Brunet* will participate in a "**breakfast cook-off**", and the public is also invited to host their own breakfasts during this month.

"It's all about raising the awareness of glaucoma and funds for GNZ to continue our work. I am sure the MasterChefs will be demonstrating the value of good eye sight in the kitchen to create taste and sight sensations" says Helen Mawn, Executive Manager.

Visit www.glaucoma.org.nz for further details on the event, and how to host your own **B.I.G breakfast**.

Former international cricketer, **Sir Richard Hadlee, is once again GNZ's ambassador** for this year's campaign.

In the 70s and 80s, Sir Richard represented New Zealand in 86 test matches and 115 one-day internationals, facing cricket balls at 150kph and delivering them at up to 140ph.

"Good eyesight is so important whether you're facing a cricket ball or driving a car. That's why it's important to get checked," Sir Richard says.

Silent sight thief

Why do we need to raise awareness? Glaucoma is often referred to as the silent thief of sight. Most people experience no symptoms until late in the disease. The damage occurs slowly and progressively, getting worse over a long period of time.

It is estimated 68,000 New Zealanders over the age of 40 currently have glaucoma, by the year 2031 it is anticipated this will grow to 76,000.

What concerns health professionals is that with early detection, blindness from glaucoma is preventable. A glaucoma eye examination can pick up the disease very early and appropriate treatment can halt its progression and preserve sight. Yet it is estimated around 50% of New Zealanders with glaucoma don't know they have it.

Chair of GNZ, Professor Helen Danesh-Meyer says the key message for all New Zealanders is around early detection to prevent blindness.

That means an eye examination for glaucoma every five years from the age of 45 and every three years from the age of 60. However, at any age, if you notice changes in your eyesight, then you should have your eyes examined at that time. For example, don't rely on hobby glasses. It is a good idea to have your eyes checked by an eye health professional, just in case there is an underlying problem. In addition if you have risk factors for glaucoma, such as family history, then you may need your eyes checked more frequently.

"There is no cure – once sight is lost you can't get it back. That's why it's so important to pick it up early so treatment can stop its progression," she said.

If glaucoma is detected, ongoing treatment, and compliance, is vital.

Professor Danesh-Meyer says 98% of those who comply with their prescribed treatment for glaucoma will not go blind.

"That could mean putting in the eye drops every day for the rest of their lives. But it's a simple thing to do to save precious sight," she says.

Research shows one of the things people fear most in life is going blind. It's right up there with cancer and heart disease, probably due to the devastating effect blindness can have on quality of life.

Studies have shown sight loss is likely to lead to depression, as well as accidents in the home, sometimes resulting in hospitalisation.

"And then there are the day-to-day changes like the loss of a driver's license, or the ability to read, watch movies, or see grandchildren grow up," Professor Danesh-Meyer points out.

Please phone 0800 452 826, or email info@glaucoma.org.nz for more information.

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Background

Glaucoma New Zealand is a charitable trust, set up to eliminate blindness from glaucoma in New Zealanders. The trust provides free nationwide educational resources, public meetings, and support to those with glaucoma and their families. An important part of their work is

ongoing education for health professionals. The trust contributes to glaucoma research, while also advocating for more affordable and accessible treatments in New Zealand.

Throughout July, ASB branches and participating optometrists, ophthalmologists, and pharmacies around the country, are supporting Glaucoma New Zealand's Awareness Appeal with donation boxes where a pen can be obtained in exchange for a small donation.

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