

# Eyelight



Winter 2025

**An inspiring  
fundraiser  
for your sight**

**How Carol manages  
multiple conditions**

**IOP: why is it measured?**

**GLAU@MA NZ**  
TO SAVE SIGHT



# The powerful difference you make

## Welcome to your Winter 2025 Eyelights.

This issue is filled with people making a difference in powerful ways.

You'll meet Niall, walking the length of the UK to raise awareness and funds. Leo, age 12, helping his classmates understand what glaucoma can feel like. And Carol, managing two eye conditions while navigating long waits in the public system.

My heart feels heavy when I learn of people waiting over a year to be diagnosed or treated. I also think of the health professionals doing their best under immense pressure.

But that's why Glaucoma NZ exists, offering FREE support and information. And that's why your support is so vital.

Together, we help people manage in the meantime, and support the professionals

who care for them. But funding this work is getting harder. We don't receive government funding. Every community symposium, webinar, support group and resource we offer (including *Eyelights*) is available free thanks to people like you.

To Sight Savers who give monthly, community trusts, donor members, partners and sponsors, fundraisers like Niall, and our valued Glaucoma Guardians who have left a legacy: thank you for believing in our mission.

You are the reason Glaucoma NZ is here. But there is much more to do and your support matters now more than ever.

Warm regards,

*Pippa*





# The optometrist fundraising for your sight



*Niall is fundraising for Glaucoma NZ.*

Niall McCormack is seven weeks into a solo walk across the United Kingdom. He's got a backpack, a tent, and a heart set on saving sight.

Some people run marathons. Others bake, or shave their hair. Niall walks. For those he may never meet. For the power of early diagnosis. For sight that can still be saved.

The Hawke's Bay optometrist is currently walking a 1,900km trail from Land's End in England to John o' Groats in Scotland. Before that, he added a few extra days to start at Lizard Point, the UK's true southernmost tip. If he was going to do this, he was going to do it properly.

"I've got my little tent and the backpack and just... see how it goes," he said before flying out. He hadn't trained much, but his smile said it all.

**There's no crew trailing him, no big production behind the scenes. Just determination, a love for people, and a deep belief that sight matters.**

Niall sees glaucoma patients often. "A third of my work is glaucoma," he says. "It's often symptom-free. That's what makes it so dangerous. People don't realise until their vision's already gone."

That's what fuels this walk. Every kilometre he covers is in service of earlier diagnosis, more empowering education, and better support for people facing glaucoma, both here in New Zealand and abroad.

Niall is raising funds for two causes: equipping a rural eye clinic in Tanzania and supporting Glaucoma NZ's mission to eliminate avoidable blindness in New Zealand.

Along the way, people stop him when they see the QR code on his backpack. Some donate on the spot. Others offer a cup of tea, a warm word, or a cheer from the sidelines.

He shares daily video logs filled with dry humour and reflections from the road. Even on rough days, Niall signs off with, "All in all, it was a good day." His optimism holds steady.

**This journey is powered by heart, but it's your support that turns it into real, lasting change for fellow New Zealanders.**

When you donate, you walk alongside Niall. More importantly, you help fund early diagnosis, empowering education, and practical tools that prevent avoidable blindness from glaucoma.

**Donate at [glaucoma.org.nz/niall](https://glaucoma.org.nz/niall) now.** Your support will help protect sight and change lives.



*Niall reaches Scotland on Week 5 of walking.*

### Rob's story:

## **“You’re not coming in unless you’ve worn these glasses”**

Back in March, during Glaucoma Awareness Month, you helped shine a light on glaucoma across Aotearoa, New Zealand. One of the tools launched during the campaign was a set of simulation glasses. They were created to help others see the world through the eyes of someone with glaucoma.

For Rob, a long-time Glaucoma NZ member living with moderate to advanced glaucoma, they’ve become a powerful way to connect with others.

“I’ll finally be able to show you what I see – or don’t see,” Rob said. After requesting the simulation glasses, he received three pairs in the mail, each showing the progression of glaucoma from early to advanced. “They’re pretty accurate,” he said, and laughed. “From now on, when you come to my place, you can only be admitted once you’ve put these glasses on.”

With several years of lived experience and two decades of hindsight, Rob knows how difficult it can be to explain what it’s like to others. The strange gaps. The missed objects. The things that are just out of view. These glasses, he says, help him share what words can’t.

Rob’s journey with glaucoma started long before he was officially diagnosed.

**"Around the year 2000, I had an ophthalmologist mention something about glaucoma after an eye pressure check, but I chose to ignore it."** he said.



Rob explains his glaucoma using simulation glasses.

“I was going through a separation at the time, his fees were huge, and it wasn’t at the top of my list.” Rob wasn’t diagnosed until 2019, but that moment stuck with him. “Twenty-five years later... bummer.”

Now, Rob’s passion is spreading awareness. Whether it’s through the simulation glasses or welcoming an optometrist onto his radio station, Beach FM. “I’m pretty passionate about early detection,” he said. “I can blame myself for not doing something about it earlier.”

His story shows why tools like the simulation glasses matter. Why early detection matters. And why sharing lived experience, whether in your lounge or over the airwaves, can help others feel seen and understood.

### **Help raise awareness in your own way**

Rob shows that spreading the word about glaucoma doesn’t need to be big or flashy.

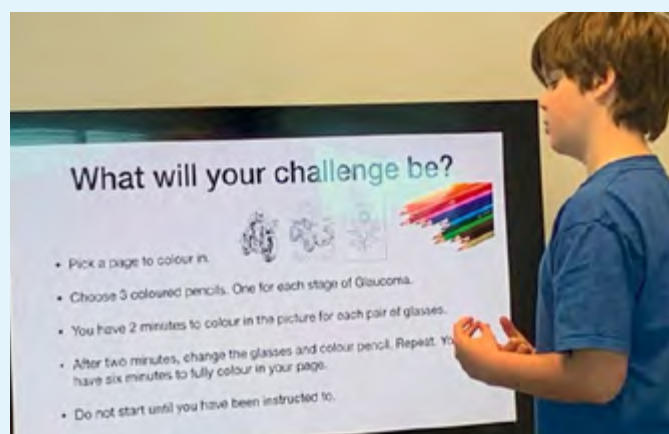
If you would like to share your story, speak at a local event, or simply help others understand what glaucoma is, we’d love to hear from you. Everyone has a part to play in making glaucoma more visible. Email [info@glaucoma.org.nz](mailto:info@glaucoma.org.nz) to learn how you can get involved.

# Leo's Challenge: Changing minds at just 12 years old

Leo is just 12, and already he's helping more people understand what it's like to live with glaucoma.

Born with congenital glaucoma, Leo has faced more surgeries than most people will in a lifetime. Yet he shows up with kindness, creativity and a quiet strength that's impossible to miss.

This Glaucoma Awareness Month, Leo ran a creative challenge to help his classmates understand what living with glaucoma can feel like. He gave a presentation, then ran an activity using simulation glasses that mimic glaucoma vision loss. Each student had to colour in while wearing the glasses.



Leo raised awareness at school.

A big thank you to Leo for sharing his story and helping others understand what living with glaucoma can feel like. And thank you to all the members who continue to stand behind young leaders like Leo. You're helping create a future where no one has to face glaucoma alone.

Email [info@glaucoma.org.nz](mailto:info@glaucoma.org.nz) if you need help with your event or activity.

# Carol's Story: You've got to stay on top of it

Carol has lived with glaucoma for more than 14 years. More recently, she was diagnosed with macular degeneration, a separate eye condition that affects central vision. She manages both with drops for glaucoma, and monthly injections for macular degeneration.

Her weeks are shaped by appointments, eye drops, follow-ups and phone calls. A single visit to the hospital can take up to three hours. Getting there isn't simple either, especially after injections when her vision is too blurry to drive. There's no bus from her house to the hospital, so she uses a Grey Power taxi card that brings the fare down to \$5. "It's strict to get, but it makes a difference."

"Everyone's lovely at the hospital," Carol says. "But you've got to keep on them."

For Carol, it's not about blame. It's about staying proactive in a system that's doing its best but can still be stretched.

Her practical, patient and positive mindset shapes her approach to her care. She writes everything down and keeps every issue of *Eyelight*s.

Carol's not sharing her story to give advice. More to offer reassurance about what's helped her stay steady. "If you can keep records, it helps."

She's also a SightSaver, donating every month to make sure others have the education needed to keep their sight.

When you become a Sight Saver, you promote regular eye checks and build confidence with knowledge. This is vital for people with unanswered questions and delayed appointments.

To join Carol and become a SightSaver, visit [glaucoma.org.nz/sightsaver](https://glaucoma.org.nz/sightsaver) today.

**Sight Saver**  
Glaucoma NZ

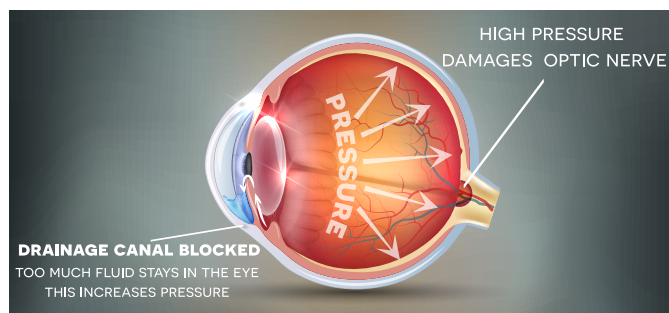


# Jina Bae, Specsavers Optometrist: What is "IOP"?

Some Glaucoma NZ members recognise that intraocular pressure is important, but admit that they aren't sure why. We asked Specsavers Optometrist, Jina Bae, to explain what intraocular pressure (IOP) is and what it has to do with glaucoma.

## What is intraocular pressure (IOP)?

Intraocular pressure (IOP) is simply the pressure inside your eye. All eyes produce and drain fluid at different rates, leaving the eye with a varying rate of pressure. Normal IOP falls between 10-21 mmHg, but this can vary from person to person.



## Why is IOP linked to glaucoma?

Glaucoma is an eye disease that damages the optic nerve, which is responsible for sending visual information to your brain. High eye pressure is the biggest risk factor for glaucoma, though some people can still develop glaucoma with normal IOP—this is called normal-tension glaucoma.

## Why is controlling IOP so important?

Lowering eye pressure can reduce the risk of glaucoma progression. While not everyone with high IOP develops glaucoma, it's still the most important modifiable risk factor. That's why regular eye exams are crucial—to catch and manage high IOP to reduce the risk of preventable vision loss.

## Does everyone with high IOP get glaucoma?

Not always. Some people can have high eye pressure but never develop glaucoma (this is called ocular hypertension). On the other hand, some people do get glaucoma even with normal IOP. But regardless of the numbers, keeping your IOP in check is key to protecting your vision.

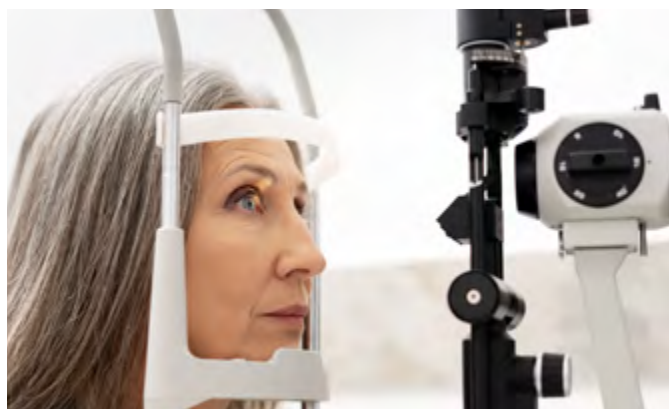
## How is IOP controlled?

To control your IOP, your specialist may recommend one or more treatments to reduce fluid production or improve fluid drainage:

- Eye drops
- Oral medications
- Laser treatments
- Surgery

## Can you feel the difference if you have a high IOP?

If you have high IOP, you most likely would never know until you have an eye test and it is measured. If you waited until you experienced symptoms relevant to high IOP or glaucoma such as blurred vision, halos around lights, eye pain or nausea, it is likely damage would have already been done to your optic nerve. The best thing to do is to have regular eye tests so that you can ensure your eyes are healthy and anything detected can be managed early and effectively.



Regular eye tests are important.

## The bottom line:

Glaucoma usually has no symptoms until advanced vision loss occurs. That's why regular eye check-ups at least once every two years or more often if clinically recommended or you experience any changes to vision or eyes are a must. Catching eye conditions like glaucoma

early and keeping your intraocular pressure under control are some of the best ways to protect your sight for the long run.



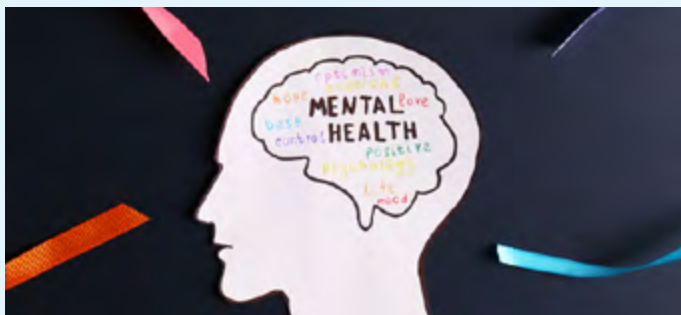
*Jina Bae completed her Bachelor's degree in Optometry at The University of Auckland in 2022.*

## Glaucoma and Mental Health: You're Not Imagining It

If you've ever felt anxious before an eye appointment or wondered if your fears are "too much", you're not alone.

At Glaucoma NZ's July 2025 Professional Education Symposium, Auckland ophthalmologist Dr Sonya Bennett invited eye health professionals to look beyond eye pressure and treatment plans to something just as vital: emotional health.

"Many of you may have experienced an episode of anxiety or depression in your lives," she said. "...none of us are immune."



Glaucoma is lifelong. While treatment can slow or prevent vision loss, living with that uncertainty, day after day, year after year, can quietly wear you down. As Dr Bennett put it, "We underestimate the psychological dimensions of this disease, because we're so intent on concentrating on the medical side of things."

And the research backs her up. People living with glaucoma are more likely to experience anxiety and depression than the general population. In some cases,

those mental health challenges don't just follow a diagnosis, they may even increase the risk of developing glaucoma or affect how it progresses.

Dr Bennett shared stories from her clinic: patients gripped by fear before each appointment, worried they're losing more sight. "...they're not in control of what's happening, and that can be terrifying."

One of the hardest parts of her job? Telling someone they can no longer drive. "I absolutely hate it when I have to tell patients they're no longer eligible to continue driving," she said. "It's one of the most difficult things we have to do."

Her message was clear: medical care matters, but emotional support should be part of the plan too.

At Glaucoma NZ, we believe the same. We invest in professional education so your care team sees the whole picture. Not only what's happening in your eyes, but what's happening in your life.

If your glaucoma journey is feeling heavy, there are services and people who can help:

- **Talk to your GP or glaucoma clinic:** Many practices now have Health Improvement Practitioners (HIPs) who are trained to support mental wellbeing and can help with practical next steps. *(continued on page 8)*

# Love Your Eyes Symposiums: Confidence, clarity and connection

Glaucoma might be part of life, but there are ways to feel more in control. Across New Zealand, people are gaining the knowledge and support they need to manage their condition with more confidence. That's what Love Your Eyes Symposiums are all about.

In recent months, events have taken place in Whangārei, the Hutt Valley and Auckland. These free gatherings bring communities together to hear from experts, ask questions and gain practical tips for living with glaucoma. Attendees often leave feeling better equipped and more at ease.

Each symposium is made possible through the generosity of charitable trusts that support equitable access to glaucoma education.

In Whangārei, the LW Nelson Trust (managed by Public Trust) provided support. In the Hutt Valley, it was the ANZ Staff Foundation. In Auckland, the Dragon Community Trust made it possible to offer a fully Mandarin-language event, complete with tailored written resources. Cantonese materials are currently in development.

The Auckland event, delivered in partnership with Age Concern, welcomed 108 attendees and three expert speakers.

*(continued from page 7)*

- **Text or call 1737:** A free 24/7 service to talk with a trained counsellor.  
[www.1737.org.nz](http://www.1737.org.nz)
- **Anxiety NZ Helpline:** 0800 ANXIETY (0800 269 4389) or visit  
[www.anxiety.org.nz/helpline](http://www.anxiety.org.nz/helpline)
- **Depression NZ:** Freephone 0800 111 757 or text 4202. More info at  
[www.depression.org.nz/get-help](http://www.depression.org.nz/get-help)

And if you just want to chat about your glaucoma, our **Glaucoma NZ helpline** is always here on 0800 452 826. Because glaucoma doesn't just affect eyesight. It affects lives. And you deserve support.



With thanks to the Dragon Trust.

Volunteers helped create a warm and welcoming environment for everyone who joined. It's this spirit of generosity and shared purpose that brings each symposium to life.

One attendee in Whangārei shared: "This was excellent, even for a person like me who does not have glaucoma. It was so good to learn about how the parts of our eyes work, and to learn glaucoma is very different in each person."

**The next Love Your Eyes Symposium will be held in Rotorua, Saturday 18th October 2025, 10am-11:30am at Parksyde Community Centre, 7-9 Tarewa Place, Rotorua.**

To find out when a symposium is planned in your region, **sign up for the Glaucoma NZ monthly e-newsletter by emailing [info@glaucoma.org.nz](mailto:info@glaucoma.org.nz).**

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by eye specialists**

from August to  
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**GLAUCOMA NZ**  
Spring Education Webinars



Register online today at  
**[glaucoma.org.nz/education-seminar](http://glaucoma.org.nz/education-seminar)**

*Glaucoma NZ is a registered charitable trust (No. CC21421) that receives no government funding. Education resources & support are free thanks to the generosity of Glaucoma NZ members. Donations of \$5 and over are tax deductible.*

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