

# Eyelight

November 2025

You're not  
alone with  
glaucoma

Glaucoma NZ  
**SiGHTWiSE**  
Programme

NZ Glaucoma research

**GLAUCOMA** NZ  
TO SAVE SIGHT

**TRILLIAN**  
SERIOUS ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY





*Connection is at the heart of everything we do – Glaucoma NZ's volunteers and Clinical Educator at the Eye Institute Auckland Annual Optometry Conference for 2025. (Left to right: Evelyn, Hazel, Lisa, and Jas).*

## Connection you make possible

### Welcome to the final *Eyelights* of 2025.

This is such a vibrant and bustling time of year, and we're ending it on a real high thanks to you.

As we head towards summer, I've been thinking a lot about connection and how it ties everything we do at Glaucoma NZ together. It's your connection to us, to your own eye health, and to others walking a similar path that makes this community so powerful.

This year, your support has fuelled real momentum. From the development of our SiGHTWiSE programme to preparing our very first Impact Report, everything you've helped us achieve is setting us up to reach even greater heights. If you'd like to read the Impact Report before it's officially released, give us a call and we'll be happy to send you a copy.

Just last month, the generous Freemasons Foundation made it possible for us to deliver seven Love Your Eyes glaucoma symposiums in 2026. That's 40 percent more than in 2025 and more than double what we held in 2024. It's a clear example of how your support creates lasting impact.

Amid the rush of the festive season, I hope you find moments to pause, laugh, and spend time with the people who make life bright. I also hope this edition of *Eyelights* reminds you just how important your voice, your presence, and your generosity are to the future of sight in Aotearoa NZ.

With gratitude and warm wishes,

*Pippa*





## You're not alone with glaucoma

In 1988, Trish woke up one morning and couldn't see out of one eye. There had been no warning. She described it "like a curtain coming down," the result of a retinal detachment that was later repaired with surgery. A few years later, in 1991, she was diagnosed with glaucoma.

"I was very, very upset at the time," Trish says. "But as the years have gone by, I realise I've been lucky. My check-ups are regular and the decline has been slow."

More than three decades on, she has learnt to balance glaucoma with a full and active life. A former teacher, Trish now works in a disability care home, trains agility dogs, goes to the gym three times a week, and enjoys line dancing with friends. "I try not to let it stop me from doing anything," she says.

Each year she travels from Invercargill to Christchurch for specialist appointments - a routine she has long accepted.

Trish started the Invercargill Glaucoma Support Group. Wanting to make things easier for others living with glaucoma, she offers locals space to meet and share their experience. "You can feel isolated at times and to have people who you can share stories with is always helpful for morale," she says.

It is something you may relate to, that feeling of relief when you can talk to someone who truly understands what living with glaucoma is like. Glaucoma NZ has a service that builds on that same sense of connection, offering one-on-one support for members. It's called SiGHTWiSE, and you can read about it later in this *Eyelights* issue.

Trish values connection and shared experience. Knowing there are others who understand makes all the difference. Her



*Trish ensures Invercargill members have support.*

enthusiasm has brought others on board, including a friend from line dancing who also lives with glaucoma. Together, they volunteered at the Invercargill Care Expo, raising awareness of glaucoma and inviting others to join the support group.

For Trish, living with glaucoma means staying connected and doing what she can to look after her sight. "I never miss my drops. I keep fit, eat well, and do what I can to slow it down," she says. "You kind of accept it. This is life now, but you can still live it fully."

We asked Trish what she thought of Glaucoma NZ's SiGHTWiSE programme which offers one-on-one support.

**"It would be really good to be able to ask as many questions as needed and not be under time pressure or feel like you're a nuisance,"** she says.

Trish believes a one-on-one support programme can help people like her, who live far from their specialist and want reassurance between visits. "Sometimes you just need someone to talk to about what's normal and what's not," she adds.

Her story is a reminder that while every glaucoma journey is different, none of us have to go through it alone. It echoes the reason SiGHTWiSE was created.

You can read more about the SiGHTWiSE programme on page 5.

# Your generosity in action: Next steps toward an impactful clinical trial

Congratulations to medical student Robin Yang for being awarded this year's Gordon Sanderson Scholarship. Professor Helen Danesh-Meyer will supervise Robin to deliver the ethics proposal for a Clinical Study on Preservatives in Glaucoma Eyedrops.

As you may know, this is an exciting project with significance to all New Zealanders living with glaucoma, as the clinical trial will form part of our campaign to influence Pharmac to improve the choice of available preservative-free glaucoma drops in NZ. **This is the continuation of your generosity – thank you for your support!**



Robin is the Gordon Sanderson Scholar for 2025.

## Seeing beyond the eye: How NZ Research is transforming glaucoma care

Researchers in New Zealand are at the forefront of uncovering new ways to understand, predict, and prevent vision loss from this disease. Three recent studies show how they are changing what we know about glaucoma, from lifetime risks of blindness, to how we define the disease, to what happens in the brain itself.

### How Often Does Glaucoma Lead to Blindness?

A team in Auckland led by Dr Jay Meyer reviewed the records of over 400 New Zealand patients with glaucoma who had passed away, asking a simple but powerful question: what was their vision like at the end of life?

The results were sobering. Around 20% were blind in at least one eye, and 10% had severe vision loss in both eyes. The greatest risks were in older people, had very high eye pressure, or already had

advanced disease when first diagnosed. This highlights the importance of catching glaucoma early, because once vision is lost, it cannot be restored.

### Rethinking How We Define Glaucoma

Another study, led by Dr William Schierding and Professor Helen Danesh-Meyer from the University of Auckland, is working with the massive UK Biobank (over half a million participants). The researchers tackled a more technical but equally important issue: how do we define “glaucoma” in large studies?

Many projects simply rely on a doctor's diagnosis code. But this research showed that if you only count people who both have a diagnosis and are receiving treatment, you get much stronger signals when looking at genetic risk and eye scan results. In other words, these people likely have more severe disease, and *(continued on page 7)*

# Your new programme's heart: **Connection, clarity, and care**

Some people have a way of making complicated things feel simple. Of replacing worry with calm. Of helping you feel seen and supported, even when the topic is anything but easy.

For Glaucoma NZ's new Clinical Educator, Lisa, that's not just what she does. It's *who she is*.

"I think what makes the most lasting impression isn't the fancy equipment," Lisa says with a gentle laugh. "It's the time you spend helping someone understand their eyes, and what's really going on."

As an optometrist and Glaucoma NZ member for over a decade, Lisa's passion lies in turning information into understanding. She knows that knowledge, when delivered with empathy, can make all the difference.

"I've spoken to people who are very proactive, who've done all the research, and still they just want reassurance from someone independent – someone who isn't tied to their treatment," she says. "That's what builds trust. That's what helps them feel confident moving forward."

That same empathy and clarity are at the heart of SiGHTWiSE, Glaucoma NZ's newest patient support programme.

Through SiGHTWiSE, you can have one-on-one conversations with Glaucoma NZ's Clinical Educators, like Lisa, to talk through your glaucoma journey, from diagnosis to treatment and everything in between.



Lisa (right) promoting SiGHTWiSE.

It's a space to ask questions in plain language, feel understood, and walk away with resources that make sense for you. Everyone's glaucoma journey is different," Lisa says.

She's quick to add that this isn't a new direction for Glaucoma NZ. It's the next evolution of what members themselves helped build.

**"Glaucoma NZ members shaped the resources that exist today. SiGHTWiSE takes that care one step further, wrapping more personalised support around you."**

Lisa calls herself a 'connector', offering an analogy: "Like a library, Glaucoma NZ has a range of resources. As SiGHTWiSE's Clinical Educator, I'm like the librarian who helps you find the right book for what you need right now."

And if it's not the right time for you just yet, that's okay too. "SiGHTWiSE will be here whenever you need it," Lisa says. "It's about walking alongside you, at your pace." Because while every glaucoma journey is unique, no one should have to walk it alone.

Learn more or join SiGHTWiSE today:  
Phone 0800 452 826 to enroll or visit  
[glaucoma.org.nz/sightwise](https://glaucoma.org.nz/sightwise)

# Recent online patient education: Keeping you informed

Glaucoma NZ recently hosted five online education sessions as part of its 2025 Spring Seminar Series, designed to help people living with glaucoma better understand and manage their eye health. Below is a sneak peek at two sessions and insights shared by expert speakers. Don't forget to always ask your specialist about the treatment that's right for you.

## Watery and Dry Eyes: Tips for Patients on Lifelong Glaucoma Drops

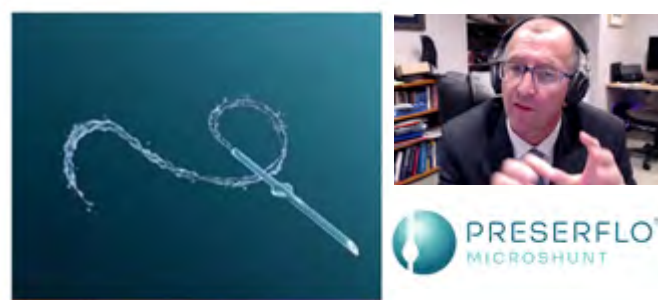
Dr Sid Ogra, Expert in Oculoplastics and Cataract Surgery, explored a common but often overlooked issue for people living with glaucoma: dry or watery eyes. Dr Ogra explained that long-term use of glaucoma eye drops, especially those with preservatives, can irritate the eye surface and damage tiny oil glands that keep tears balanced. This can create a cycle of dryness, discomfort, and excessive watering.



The key message? You don't have to live with these symptoms. There are preservative free drops, eyelid care routines, and specialist dry eye clinics that can help restore comfort and protect your eyes. If your eyes often feel dry, gritty, or watery, speak with your glaucoma specialist. There are effective options available to help you see and feel better.

## Your Guide to Glaucoma Surgery

Dr Sam Kain, Ophthalmologist at Tauranga Eye Specialists, unpacked how glaucoma surgery works to protect vision by lowering eye pressure. Using easy-to-follow analogies, Dr Kain explained that the eye's drainage system is like plumbing. When the drain becomes blocked, pressure builds up, damaging the optic nerve. He described modern procedures such as goniotomy, tiny iStent devices, and the newer PRESERFLO™ MicroShunt, which help



create or clear drainage pathways and can reduce the need for daily drops. For more advanced cases, operations like trabeculectomy or tube implants create a new channel altogether. Dr Kain also highlighted New Zealand's pioneering role in glaucoma surgery and the promising innovations now emerging. His key message: there are more ways than ever to safely manage pressure and protect your sight for the long term.

## Want more glaucoma updates between *Eyelight*s newsletter issues?

Glaucoma NZ's e-news bulletin is your chance to keep up to date with what's happening in glaucoma care, without the overwhelm.

It's short, sharp, and comes once a month, featuring a range of links to glaucoma news, personal stories and education events like those above.

Email [info@glaucoma.org.nz](mailto:info@glaucoma.org.nz) to subscribe to Glaucoma NZ's e-news.



# Seeing beyond the eye continued...

(from page 4) studying them helps uncover the clearest biological clues. This work matters because population biobanks are increasingly shaping how we understand disease and design treatments.

## Exploring New Post-Surgical Treatments

Researchers in New Zealand are exploring whether medications traditionally used for other conditions could enhance recovery and improve outcomes after glaucoma surgery. Auckland Ophthalmologist, Dr Mark Donaldson, and his team are investigating the use of colchicine (a drug better known for treating gout) as part of post-operative care following trabeculectomy, a common glaucoma operation.

The idea is that colchicine, which reduces inflammation and scarring, could help keep the surgical drainage channel open for longer, thus improving long-term pressure control in the eye. If successful, this approach could offer patients safer and more durable results from surgery, reducing the need for repeat procedures or additional medications.

## Looking Inside the Brain

Work by Schierding and Danesh-Meyer at the University of Auckland and the Mātai Research Institute in Gisborne has explored how glaucoma affects not only the eye but also the brain.

Using advanced MRI scans, they found that people with glaucoma show shrinkage in the brain's visual centres, and also in areas linked with attention and memory. These changes were closely tied to thinning of the eye's nerve layers, but not to eye pressure, which is usually the main target of glaucoma treatment. The

findings support the idea that glaucoma shares some features with other neurodegenerative conditions, such as Alzheimer's disease, and may help guide future approaches to diagnosis and therapy.

## A new picture of glaucoma

Together, these studies paint a new picture of glaucoma. It is not just about high pressure in the eye, it is about early detection, precise definitions for research, and recognising that glaucoma is a whole-brain disease. The work also positions New Zealand researchers as global leaders in using "big data," advanced imaging, and careful clinical studies to tackle one of the greatest challenges in eye health.

By diagnosing glaucoma earlier, identifying those most at risk, improving surgical outcomes, and uncovering how the disease affects the brain, we have a powerful opportunity to prevent blindness and change the future for millions around the world.



Gordon Sanderson MNZM

*Special thanks to the Gordon Sanderson Scholars who supported these New Zealand research projects, including Daniel, Sally and Kyla who received the 2022-23 scholarships. This annually awarded scholarship was established in memory of Associate Professor Gordon Sanderson, a founding trustee of Glaucoma New Zealand and a passionate eye health educator in both New Zealand and Australia.*

# Run, walk or cheer with Round the Bays: Join Miles in raising awareness and funds

**When life told Miles to slow down, he started running.**

When Miles was diagnosed with glaucoma, he had two choices: Let it stop him or find another way to move forward. He chose the second.

After years of managing multiple eye conditions, glaucoma became one more challenge to navigate. But instead of letting it define him, Miles swapped social footy for running shoes and started setting new goals. Big ones.

In 2024, he crossed the finish line at the New York Marathon. His second one.

"It's about being grateful for every day and taking the opportunities that come your way," he says. "I don't know how long I'll be able to keep doing marathons, but I'm not wasting the chance."

His left eye has limited vision. Eye drops reshaped his routine. There have been hard conversations with friends, family, and himself.

But through it all, Miles has kept moving: physically, mentally, and emotionally.

His outlook? Grit. Gratitude. Growth. And now, he's inviting you to move too.

## Join the Movement

This summer, Glaucoma NZ is taking part in Round the Bays across Christchurch, Wellington, and Auckland.

We'll be walking and running together as a community that gets it, the highs, the hurdles, and everything in between.

You don't need to run a marathon. You just need to show up.

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Miles doing his second New York Marathon.

Bring your whānau. Bring your mates.

Walk for yourself, or for someone you love.

Together, we'll show Aotearoa New Zealand what resilience looks like.

## Glaucoma doesn't stop us. It moves us.

Every step counts. Every stride matters. And every move we make together brings us closer to a future where glaucoma awareness can't be ignored.

### Ready to move with us?

Go to [roundthebays.co.nz](http://roundthebays.co.nz) to register, click to fundraise then search and select "Glaucoma NZ" in the list of charities.

Keep an eye on our social media and emails. We'll be sharing how you can join the GNZ crew in your city soon.

