

## **STOP THE CUTS TO MEDICARE FOR OPTOMETRY**

### **PETITION**

#### **TO THE HONOURABLE THE SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

This petition of Optometry Australia, the peak professional body for optometry and with a membership base of over 90% of all registered optometrists within Australia, draws to the attention of the House the:

- (i) 5 per cent cut to all scheduled optometry items under Medicare, introduced by regulation and effective 1 January 2015; and
- (ii) Extension of the optometric Medicare Benefits Schedule freeze on indexation through to July 2018.

This 5 per cent cut to all optometric Medicare items threatens patient access and sustainable service provision, especially in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Under this 5 per cent cut to scheduled fees, optometrists are now faced with the predicament to either absorb a cut in their remuneration under Medicare, despite rising practice costs, or ask their patients to pay higher out-of-pocket expenses. For many patients who already experience disadvantage, out-of-pocket costs are a significant barrier to accessing health care. Combine this with the ongoing freeze on indexation to Medicare rebates and this situation is becoming untenable for many optometrists and their patients. As optometrists are the pillars of eye care within Australia, playing a key role in the prevention and early detection of many eye and vision conditions, this disinvestment in Medicare significantly jeopardises the eye health of the broader Australian community.

We ask the House to reverse the 5 per cent cut to all scheduled optometry items under Medicare and reinstate annual indexation of the optometric Medicare Benefits Schedule.