29 January 2015

Budget Policy Division
Department of the Treasury
Langton Crescent
PARKES ACT 2600

Attention: Claudio Damiani

**Vision Australia 2015-16 Pre-Budget Submission**

Vision Australia welcomes the Australian Government’s invitation to provide our views on priorities for the 2015-16 Budget.

Vision Australia has identified priorities that would benefit the lives of the approximately 350,000 Australians who are blind or have low vision.

Investment in these areas will also assist with the Government’s commitment to repair the budget by offsetting the significantly greater cost to Government if these investments are not made.

**Support for Seniors who are blind or have low vision**

More than 70% of Australians who are blind or have low vision are over the age of 65 and will not be eligible to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

There is currently no funding to support Seniors who are living in their own home with blindness or low vision.

Vision loss prevents healthy and independent ageing and research has shown that it doubles the risk of falls, quadruples the risk of hip fractures and leads to admission to nursing homes three years earlier.

Investing in supports such as occupational therapy, assistive technology and orientation and mobility services will mean that Seniors can live in their own home for longer and avoid moving to aged care accommodation.

**Support to employ people who are blind or have low vision**

Fifty-eight per cent of Australians who are blind or have low vision are unemployed.

This is more than nine times the national average.

The current level and format of Disability Employment Services are not significantly reducing this level of unemployment.

Vision Australia works in partnership with the blind and low vision community to help them achieve the possibilities they choose in life; for the vast majority of this 350,000 strong community, productive employment remains a primary goal.

Support is needed to assist individuals to become work-ready as well as employment services to connect them with employment opportunities.

**Support for children who are blind or have low vision**

Education empowers people who are blind or have low vision with opportunity and choice. It is directly linked to gaining employment, increasing active participation in society, and reducing the burden on the State.

Once securing placement in the educational institution of their choice, students who are blind or have low vision may require a range of alternative support mechanisms in order to facilitate learning outcomes. Children benefit from the assistance of visiting teachers who provide support within the classroom setting. Students in tertiary and vocational education may require support from disability liaison officers with assessments, obtaining documents in accessible formats and enhancing participation in class.

Implementing the funding recommendations outlined in the Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling by creating an appropriately funded student with disability entitlement will significantly improve educational outcomes and future employment prospects.

**Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI) who are blind or have low vision**

Blindness is experienced at levels six times greater in ATSI communities than non-indigenous populations.

Blindness and low vision services can help but only if there is awareness of, and access to, those services. This will only happen through dedicated outreach and liaison with the communities.

Investing now in the capacity for these services to reach communities, closing the gap, and developing better targeted individual and community plans will significantly reduce the cost to the health system, that accrue later, if these interventions aren’t made in a timely fashion.

**Maryanne Diamond**

General Manager of Advocacy and Engagement