

Speech  
Opening of the Tasmanian Division of the Optometrists  
Association of Australia's Congress  
The Old Woolstore Apartment Hotel  
1 Macquarie Street  
Hobart  
20 August 2005  
2pm

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.

And thank you for the opportunity to officially open the Tasmanian Division of the Optometrists Association of Australia's Congress.

The Minister was unable to open this weekend's congress but does send his apologies.

He did tell me that a number of interstate delegates have travelled to Tasmania for this year's congress and I welcome you all.

I would also like to take the opportunity to welcome respected Melbourne Ophthalmologists, Dr Joseph Reich and Dr Joseph San Laureano and Melbourne Senior Optometrist Mark Roth who will address delegates at this year's Congress.

Eye health has been and continues to be an important component of healthcare in Australia.

Some of the significant issues facing the industry in recent times include the development of the National Eye Health Plan, the challenges facing the nation's eye health workforce and the use of therapeutic substances to treat eye disorders.

In July 2004, the Australian Health Ministers' Conference agreed that there was a need to develop a National Eye Health Plan.

The consensus was to work together to promote eye health and reduce the incidence of preventable blindness and vision loss.

Since that meeting, some real headway has been made and there has been widespread consultation among the states and territories.

In fact there is comprehensive public consultation about the National Eye Health Plan taking place as we speak.

I am particularly pleased to report that Tasmanian stakeholders were recently given an opportunity to play a role in the development of the national plan.

I'm told the final document will be presented to the Australian Health Ministers Council in November.

Once endorsed this document will form the basis for the development of a National Eye Health Plan to promote eye health and prevent avoidable blindness and vision loss.

It will set out a strategic national framework ... a blueprint for nationally coordinated action by governments, health professionals, non-government organisations, industry and individuals to work in partnership.

Importantly, it will provide an overarching direction for stakeholders to develop their own action plans.

And while we currently have excellent eye care in Tasmania the plan will ensure a nationally consistent approach to eye care, further enhancing Tasmania's current level of care.

I would like to take this opportunity to say that health workforce problems are by no means limited to Tasmania.

They exist nationally and internationally.

In Australia, the National Health Workforce Strategic Framework was designed to help shape the country's health workforce for the future.

The framework recognises the need for a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach to address our workforce issues effectively.

Such an approach is essential for us to ensure the effective and efficient use of our workforce resources to ensure the best outcomes for every member of the community.

It is therefore important that the eye care sector pursues a culture of collaboration and develops partnerships to help reduce duplication, improve service delivery and provide opportunities to examine and develop new service delivery models.

Another positive development in eye health care in Tasmania in recent years was the passage of legislation that paved the way for optometrists – who had undergone an approved therapeutics course – to prescribe a range of drugs to treat the more common and less serious conditions affecting the eye.

This was a controversial move at the time, but time has shown that it was a safe change to primary care arrangements in the State, and now other states are considering similar changes to their legislation.

Importantly I wish to advise that regarding the issue of extending the range of drugs used by optometrists the Minister has indicated he is finalizing discussions on this matter with consulted stakeholders particularly Ophthalmologists.

He is committed to bringing Tasmania in line with Victoria and he will be in a position to make an announcement along those lines shortly.

Moves such as this clearly demonstrate that Tasmania is willing to be both innovative and committed to the delivery of safe, high quality services to the community.

The fact that optometrists and ophthalmologists from other states have been attracted to participate in this congress reflects the status of Tasmania in this field of health care.

It now gives me pleasure to declare the Tasmanian Optometrists Association of Australia's Congress officially open.

Thank you.