

MEDIA RELEASE



The Hon **David Hawker** MP
Federal Member for Wannon



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EYESIGHT TREATMENT SAVED

Hundreds of Western Victorians who suffer vision loss and face blindness from macular degeneration are now assured they won't face higher costs for vital treatment.

Federal Member for Wannon, David Hawker, said the Coalition has forced the Labor Government to withdraw measures which would have made sight-saving treatment unaffordable for many locals.

"This is great news for the estimated 17,000 Australians who develop macular degeneration each year," Mr Hawker said.

"Without the treatment – an injection of the drug Lucentis into the eye – some sufferers of macular degeneration would go blind.

"The Labor Government wanted to place a cap on re-imbursing under the Extended Medicare Safety Net for these therapeutic injections which are needed on an ongoing basis, but Coalition pressure saw it dropped from legislation before Parliament at the last moment."

Under Labor's proposed caps to the Extended Medicare Safety Net re-imbursing for treatment would have plunged from an average \$236.20 per injection to just \$80.

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness in Australia, affecting one in seven Australians over the age of 50. It is responsible for almost half the cases of severe vision loss.

"To save \$4 million a year, the Rudd Government was prepared to let some people with this condition go blind – fortunately they were forced to see the stupidity of their proposals," Mr Hawker said.

President of the Australian Society of Ophthalmologists, Russell Bach, congratulated the Coalition for standing firm and removing the cap.

"This is a huge relief for sufferers of this potentially blinding condition – macular degeneration, but now as a result of this decision (people) will have access to the latest treatment," Dr Bach said.

"It is reassuring to see the political system in our democratic society can turn around such an ill-conceived decision."

Mr Hawker said the Coalition had also ensured that both Houses of Parliament would have to approve any future changes the Government wanted to make to the Extended Medicare Safety Net.

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