BACKGROUND

In May 2003 the 56th World Health Assembly passed resolution WHA56.26 on the elimination of avoidable blindness in recognition of the fact that 45 million people in the world are blind and that a further 135 million people are visually impaired. The resolution urged all member states to develop a national Vision 2020 plan in collaboration with non-government organisations and the private sector to prevent avoidable blindness.

In response to World Health Assembly resolution WHA56.26, in July 2004 the Australian Health Ministers’ Conference agreed that a National Eye Health Plan should be developed for Australia to promote eye health and reduce the incidence of avoidable blindness.

The resulting *National Framework for Action to Promote Eye Health and Prevent Avoidable Blindness and Vision Loss* (the Framework) was developed by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and the Victorian Department of Human Services in conjunction with all states and territories and in consultation with the non-government sector.

The Framework was endorsed by the Australian Health Ministers’ Conference in November 2005. It provides a blueprint for nationally coordinated action by governments, health professionals, non-government organisations, industry and individuals to work in partnership.

In accordance with the World Health Assembly resolution, the focus of the National Eye Health Framework is on the elimination of avoidable blindness and vision loss in Australia, rather than on the provision of low vision and rehabilitation services.

Avoidable blindness and vision loss refer to visual impairment due to conditions that are potentially preventable through the modification of known risk factors, or for which effective treatments exist to restore sight or prevent further vision loss.

The Framework does not focus on any one specific eye condition, but rather seeks to cover the underlying issues that are common to the prevention and treatment of eye disease and vision loss in general. It outlines five key action areas that have the potential to lead to the prevention of avoidable blindness and low vision.

The Framework requires that all jurisdictions report three yearly to Health Ministers on progress against these key action areas. This report is the first progress report.