

**The information hereunder on the incidence of Glaucoma in Australia is in response to a question on notice arising from the Victorian legislative Council Inquiry into the Performance of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.**

**The information was retrieved from the Glaucoma Australia website:  
[www.glaucoma.org.au](http://www.glaucoma.org.au)**

## **Glaucoma is called the “Sneak Thief of Sight”**

### **Glaucoma Facts**

- Glaucoma is the leading cause of irreversible blindness world wide.
- One in 10 Australians over 80 will develop glaucoma.
- First degree relatives of glaucoma patients have an 8-fold increased risk of developing the disease.
- At present, 50% of people with glaucoma in Australia are undiagnosed.
- Australian health care cost of glaucoma in 2005 was \$342 million.
- The total annual cost of glaucoma in 2005 was \$1.9 billion.
- The total cost is expected to increase to \$4.3 billion by 2025.
- The dynamic model of the economic impact of glaucoma enables cost-effectiveness comparison of various interventions to inform policy development.

*Source: Tunnel Vision. The economic impact of Open Angle Glaucoma, Centre for Eye Research Australia, 2008*

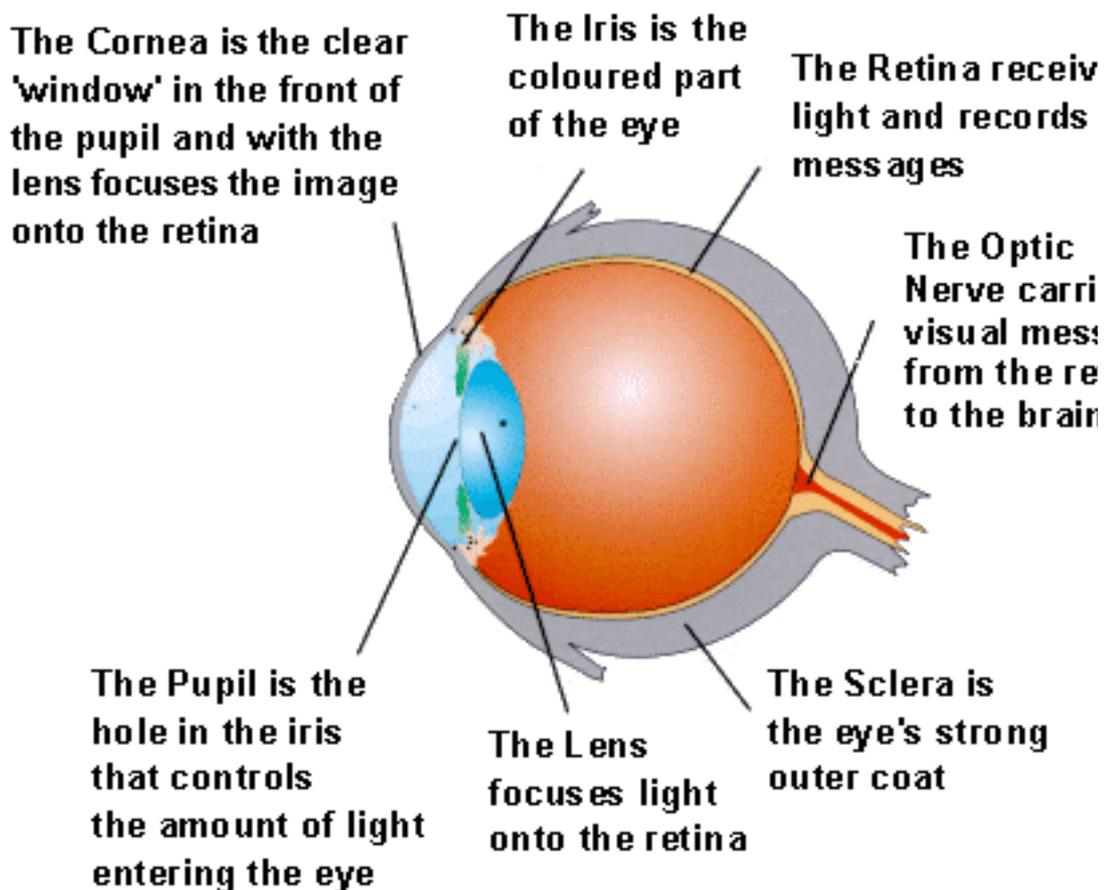
### **The Eye**

The eye works very much like an old-style camera. In the camera, the light comes in through the shutter, is focused by the lens, falls onto the film and then we take it to be processed.

In the eye, light comes in through the cornea and pupil. It is focused by the lens, falling onto the film in the eye (the retina) and then goes, via the optic nerve (the nerve of sight), to the brain (the processor) for developing.

The shape of the eye is achieved through the circulation of a clear fluid (aqueous). It bathes and nourishes the eye, keeps it firm and gives the eye a certain pressure. High pressure left uncontrolled can lead to damage of the optic nerve and result in vision loss.

It must be noted that eye pressure varies from person to person. What is high pressure for one person may not be for another.

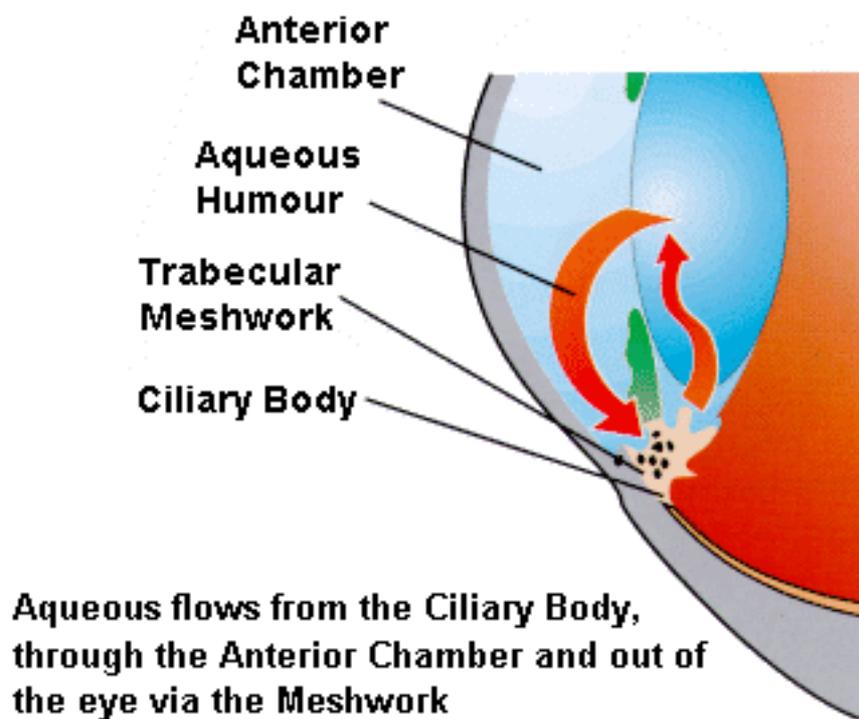


Normal Eye

## What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is the name given to a group of eye diseases in which the optic nerve at the back of the eye is slowly destroyed. In most people this damage is due to an increased pressure inside the eye - a result of blockage of the circulation of aqueous, or its drainage. In other patients the damage may be caused by poor blood supply to the vital optic nerve fibres, a weakness in the structure of the nerve, and/or a problem in the health of the nerve fibres themselves.

Over 300,000 Australians have glaucoma. While it is more common as people age, it can occur at any age. As our population becomes older, the proportion of glaucoma patients is increasing.



## What are the symptoms of glaucoma?

Chronic (primary open-angle) glaucoma is the most common type. It has no symptoms until eye sight is lost at a later stage.

Damage progresses very slowly and destroys vision gradually, starting with the side vision. One eye covers for the other, and the person remains unaware of any problem until a majority of nerve fibres have

been damaged, and a large part of vision has been destroyed. This damage is irreversible. It is progressive and usually relentless. Treatment cannot recover what has been lost. But it can arrest, or at least, slow down the damage process. That is why it is so important to detect the problem as early as possible, to be able to start treatment with as little damage to the vision as possible.

### **Who is at risk?**

Although anyone can get glaucoma, some people have a higher risk, those with

- a family history of glaucoma
- diabetes
- migraine
- short sightedness (myopia)
- long sightedness (hyperopia)
- eye injuries
- blood pressure
- past or present use of cortisone drugs (steroids)

People in these groups should have their first eye check no later than the age of 35. For most people, it is recommended to have an eye check for glaucoma by the age of 40.

### **What are some of the forms of glaucoma?**

Chronic (primary open-angle) glaucoma is the most common form of this disease. However, other forms occur:

- Low-tension or normal tension glaucoma. Occasionally optic nerve damage can occur in people with so-called normal eye pressure. This form of glaucoma is treated in the same manner as open-angle glaucoma.
- Acute (angle-closure) glaucoma. Acute glaucoma is when the pressure inside the eye rapidly increases due to the iris blocking the drain. An attack of acute glaucoma is often severe. People suffer pain, nausea, blurred vision and redness of the eye. Immediate medical help should be sought. If treatment is delayed there can be permanent visual damage in a very short time. Usually, laser surgery performed promptly can clear the blockage and protect against visual impairment.

- Congenital glaucoma. This is a rare form of glaucoma caused by an abnormal drainage system. It can exist at birth or develop later. Parents may note that the child is sensitive to light, has enlarged and cloudy eyes, and excessive watering. Surgery is usually needed.
- Secondary glaucomas. These glaucomas can develop as a result of other disorders of the eye such as injuries, cataracts, eye inflammation. The use of steroids (cortisone) has a tendency to raise eye pressure and therefore pressures should be checked frequently when steroids are used.