



# Media Release

## **BOB McMULLAN MP**

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SHADOW MINISTER FOR FEDERAL/STATE RELATIONS

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FEDERAL MEMBER FOR FRASER

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### **LABOR'S PLAN TO FIGHT BLINDNESS IN OUR REGION**

Up to 75% of blindness is treatable or preventable, yet more than half of the world's vision impaired live on Australia's doorstep in Asia and the Pacific.

A Rudd Labor government will lead efforts to give sight to the poorest of the poor in our region, and will provide up to \$22.5 million each year for two years to:

- Address eye health and vision care needs in our neighbouring countries in the Pacific using existing health system infrastructure.
- Identify and plan to expand into selected priority countries in South-East Asia.

As part of this plan, a Rudd Labor government will undertake a pilot program in the South Pacific and priority countries in South East Asia, establishing at least 10 Vision Centres and at least one Service Centre as well as providing support to the Pacific Eye Institute and training crucial eye and vision personnel.

By drawing on the skills and expertise of Australian organisations like the Fred Hollows Foundation, International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE), Christian Blind Mission International (CBMI), and the Centre for Eye Research Australia, Federal Labor will develop partnerships with regional countries to work towards the goal of eliminating avoidable blindness and vision impairment in our region.

It is unacceptable that 153 million poor people who remain unnecessarily blind or vision impaired due to uncorrected refractive error which can be corrected with an eye examination and the right pair of glasses.

Globally, 161 million people are blind or vision impaired due to eye disease such as cataract, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, trachoma and macular degeneration and around half a million children become blind every year.

Health is a cornerstone of development and poverty alleviation. An ever-increasing number of people are at risk of visual impairment as populations grow and demographic shifts move towards the predominance of older age groups.

It is not only the right thing to do, it is critical that Australia works to eliminate avoidable blindness among the poorest of the poor in the region. Giving people with avoidable blindness the opportunity to engage in productive economic activities, will contribute to greater economic and social stability in the region.

Federal Labor will support Vision 2020 to eliminate avoidable blindness by controlling major blinding conditions, conducting eye examinations, developing infrastructure and building the capacity of eye care workers.