

MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSTRALIAN CHARITY MARKS CATARACT AWARENESS MONTH WITH KEY MESSAGE: BABIES AND KIDS CAN GET CATARACTS TOO

The Melbourne-based head of national charity Cataract Kids Australia, Megan Pictor, has an important message to mark global Cataract Awareness Month this June: babies and children can get cataracts too. Pictor wants new parents and grandparents to know the telltale signs of vision problems in infants and children to avoid irreversible vision impairment.

Cataract is a clouding of the normally clear lens of the eye. Most people think of cataracts as a problem affecting older people. Cataract affects around 10% of the Australian population over the age of 65 years (Source: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/eye-health/eye-health/contents/how-common-is-visual-impairment#Cataract>). But babies can be born with cataract too, or the condition can develop in children of any age. If left untreated during this critical early period when vision is developing, cataracts can lead to irreversible loss of sight. Pictor, who established Cataract Kids Australia in 2017 after her son was born with cataracts in both eyes, wants the families of babies and young children to know the warning signs and seek treatment early.

There are two key warning signs to be aware of. One is a white spot on the pupil – the middle part of the eye that is usually black. This might be visible just by looking, or in a photograph. The other sign is when babies' eyes are not aligned (straight) at all times or tracking faces after around 2 months of age. Pictor says "it's a myth that a baby's eyes normally drift or don't line up straight until they're a year old. This is a warning sign that should be checked out urgently by a GP or optometrist".

Babies' eyes are checked soon after they are born, but sometimes cataracts are missed. If parents have any concerns about their child's eyes they should seek prompt medical advice. "The eye health professionals have told me they would rather check things out if parents are worried and rule out any problem, than discover that cataracts have been found too late to recover a baby's vision", says Pictor.

Cataract Kids Australia works to support babies and children affected by cataract, and their families, as well as advocating for improved research and treatment of this challenging condition. For more information visit www.cataractkids.org.au

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****Families are available for interview; see next page****

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Emily

Gorgeous Emily, now two years old, was born happy and healthy. When she was around 4 or 5 months old, mum Ashlee noticed Emily's right eye was a little lazy, and at 6 months mentioned this during a routine appointment. Ashlee was told that she could either get a referral to an eye specialist or wait and see. Thankfully, she got a speedy referral and Emily was diagnosed with a cataract in her eye, requiring immediate surgery to save her sight.

Mum Ashlee says "When the ophthalmologist said Emily has a juvenile cataract in her right eye I first asked 'What's that exactly?' I knew it was something old people got, right..? When the ophthalmologist explained it to me I started to cry."

If it wasn't for her observant mum Emily would have lost her vision. Now that her cataract has been removed, Emily wears a patch over her left eye for several hours each day to strengthen her right eye and try to make up for that crucial development lost. Thanks to the surgery, her future for good vision is bright – and Ashlee wants to share Emily's story so that other parents know to trust their judgement. "If your baby has a lazy or wandering eye, or you are worried that something isn't right with their vision, definitely get it checked out – don't wait," says Ashlee.



This Melbourne-based family is available for interview regarding their experience of childhood cataract. Please contact Megan Pictor (info@cataractkids.org.au; 0407885580) to arrange this.