

## 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 lifelong blindness.*

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 blindness.** 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 usually 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 specialists 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](http://www.cataractkids.org.au)

Ends

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

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