

**Press Release**  
**12 September, 2011**

## **Sight Loss is Biggest Fear amongst Ireland's Over 50s**

### **AMD Awareness Week Highlights Leading Cause of Registered Blindness in Ireland**

New research carried out amongst people in Ireland over the age of 50 identified sight loss as their most commonly held fear, with 40% of respondents highlighting that they would miss their independence most if they were affected by visual impairment, followed by reading (23%) and driving (16%).<sup>(1)</sup>

The research was carried out ahead of this year's AMD Awareness Week, which takes place from Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> September and is supported by National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI), Fighting Blindness, the Irish College of Ophthalmologists (ICO) and the Association of Optometrists Ireland (AOI), in association with Novartis.

AMD Awareness Week aims to increase public awareness on how to spot the symptoms of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and to highlight the importance of early diagnosis. AMD is the principal cause of sight loss for people over the age of 50 in the Western World.<sup>(2)</sup> Although it is not as well known as other eye diseases such as cataracts or glaucoma, it is the most common cause of registered blindness in Ireland and affects one in ten people over the age of 50.<sup>(3)</sup>

The research identified that 34% of respondents, who are all in the most at-risk age category, have never heard of age-related macular degeneration.

On a brighter note, it revealed that people over 50 are generally diligent in getting their eyes tested. 60% of respondents get their eyes tested every two years, the recommended frequency for the age group, with just over a third (35%) of respondents getting their eyes tested once a year.

According to Lynda McGivney-Nolan, Optometric Advisor with the AOI, *"We recommend that people in the over 50 age bracket have an eye examination at least every two years to have their vision tested and to get the back of their eyes checked. The most obvious symptoms of AMD are sudden onset of distortion and blurring in the centre of a person's vision and early detection of these symptoms ensures that the condition can be treated effectively."*

The test to detect the early signs of AMD can be carried out by local opticians/optometrists and eye doctors. It normally takes place as part of a routine eye examination. It is simple, quick, non invasive and gives an immediate result.

Dr. Marie Hickey-Dwyer of the Irish College of Ophthalmologists explains, *“AMD affects the macula, the central part of the retina at the back of the eye that is responsible for the ‘straight-ahead’ vision necessary for everyday activities such as reading, driving, telling the time or identifying faces.*

*“Lifestyle changes such as ensuring a balanced diet, cessation of smoking and blood pressure control can help prevent AMD progression, but age is still the main contributing factor and overall, early detection is key. There are now treatment options available for AMD and these have dramatically improved over the past few years so that in many cases the progression of AMD can be halted and sight even improved in some.”*

Throughout AMD Awareness Week, free testing will be available to detect the early signs of AMD at a range of locations nationwide and a Novartis mobile testing unit will visit venues in Dublin, Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford. Please see [www.amd.ie](http://www.amd.ie) for details.

Loretto Callaghan, Managing Director of Novartis Ireland, said *“We are delighted to continue supporting AMD Awareness Week and helping patients in Ireland get access to innovative treatments.”*

**ENDS**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **About the National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI)**

NCBI is a not for profit charitable organisation which offers support and services to people experiencing difficulty with their eyesight.

It offers a range of services nationwide to assist people with sight loss to adapt to their situation and maintain their independence. For further information, contact NCBI on LoCall 1850 33 43 53 or visit [www.ncbi.ie](http://www.ncbi.ie)

### **About Association of Optometrists Ireland**

The Association of Optometrists is the professional representative body for the vast majority of Optometrists practicing in Ireland.

As well as representing the profession in all matters relating to Optometry, the Association provides a supervisory and ethical environment for its members to ensure the highest possible standards in the delivery of clinical and dispensing services to the public. For further information, visit [www.optometrists.ie](http://www.optometrists.ie)

### **About Fighting Blindness**

Fighting Blindness was set up as a support group in 1983 by families affected by eye disease and has now evolved into a charity funding world-leading research.

Fighting Blindness is working to find cures and treatments for retinal degenerative conditions which affect an estimated 65,000 adults and children in Ireland and 40 million worldwide. For further information, visit [www.fightingblindness.ie](http://www.fightingblindness.ie)

#### **About Irish College of Ophthalmologists**

Established in 1991, the Irish College of Ophthalmologists (ICO) is the professional body for medical and surgical eye doctors in Ireland.

The College represents over 200 medical and surgical eye doctors throughout Ireland and Europe. It is the recognised body for ophthalmic training and education in the Republic of Ireland. For further information, visit [www.eyedoctors.ie](http://www.eyedoctors.ie)

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#### **REFERENCES:**

<sup>(1)</sup> Online study of a sample of 155 people over the age of 50 in Ireland, conducted by Pembroke Communications, August 2011

<sup>(2)</sup> [www.amdalliance.org](http://www.amdalliance.org)

<sup>(3)</sup> Bressler NM. Early detection and treatment of neovascular age-related macular degeneration. *JABF* 2002; 15: 2.