

Guide to living with blindness or low vision



Cheryl,
Vision Australia client

Introduction

This guide is a good place to start if an eye doctor, such as an ophthalmologist, has diagnosed you with blindness or low vision, and you're not sure what to do next.

We understand vision loss can be life changing – not only for you but also for your family and friends.

You might find it hard to imagine how you'll keep doing the things you've always enjoyed.

This guide covers some of the emotional, practical and financial supports on offer to you. There's also information on living well with a vision condition.

All of the things listed in this guide have been guided by people who are blind or have low vision including what they found helpful after receiving a diagnosis.

Keep this guide in a safe place so you can refer to it whenever you wish. There is also a checklist at the end of the guide to support you now and into the future.



A Vision Australia staff member showing a client kitchen products.



A magnifier being used to read a book in small print.

Understanding your eye condition

It's useful to learn about your eye condition and what to expect. If that's of interest to you, visit our resources on [eye conditions](#).

Recognising your feelings

It's normal to experience a wide range of emotions such as depression, grief and anger, after receiving a diagnosis of blindness or low vision.

Trying to go it alone when you're feeling low can make things even more challenging. In our experience, if you're open to looking after your mental wellbeing, it can make the world of difference to your outlook on life.



Brittnee,
Vision Australia client

Quality Living Groups

One of the most powerful things is talking freely about your feelings with others going through similar experiences. Vision Australia's [Quality Living Groups](#) are ideal if you're keen to share what's on your mind and learn from others in a safe and caring space.

This eight-week phone-based group focuses on:

- Developing ways to cope, build resilience and confidence.
- Understanding how others handle everyday tasks e.g. brushing teeth, travelling, eating meals.
- Discussing ways to talk about your eye condition with others including how to respond to negative questions.
- Technologies that can help you (ie white canes, smartphones to help you read menus or identify colours, magnifiers, library tools etc.)

For many participants, it's the beginning of new and lasting friendships with others who truly understand.

To find out more visit: visionaustralia.org/qualityliving.



Paul,
Vision Australia client

Talk to your general practitioner (GP)

GPs can help you in a range of ways: they can create a mental health care plan for you, and refer you onto local services like a counsellor or psychologist.

Talk to a psychologist or counsellor

Many find regular meetings with a psychologist or counsellor very useful. Through a GP referral, in many instances, up to 10 visits a year can be claimed on Medicare which means you will get all or some of the cost of a visit back. These professionals can help you adjust to major life changes like vision loss.

Supports on offer

This section covers just some of the services available that can help you maintain your independence.

These services are delivered by qualified Vision Australia specialists who work with you to understand your goals.

There's no rush to take up any services – we just want you to know that doing the things you've always done is possible after a diagnosis of blindness or low vision.

Getting out and about

Orientation and mobility specialists can support you get around safely and independently. Their role is to provide one-on-one training to support your interests and goals. You might learn how to use equipment like a white cane, public transport, crossing the road and navigating steps.

Learn more about [orientation and mobility](#).

A safe home the way you want it

Occupational therapists can suggest small changes in your home allowing you to still use every space safely. They can show you tips such as using tactile features on kitchen equipment, ways to reach your front door, adding colour contrast to find cups easily and organising wardrobes and cupboards.

Equipment that might help you

There's lots of equipment to support your independence such as magnifiers to help with reading, lighting options, liquid level indicator (to help you make a hot drink), talking microwaves and much more.

When you speak with our specialist staff, they will recommend what equipment will work best for you. Depending on your situation, government funding may cover all or some of the cost of your purchases.

To learn more visit: shop.visionaustralia.org.

Government funding

There may be government funding available to help cover the cost of services you wish to access. Each subsidy will have different eligibility criteria so it's worth checking which ones are suited to you. Even if you're employed, you may be eligible for government support.

- Disability Support Pension (Blind).
- Blind Age Pension for people over 65 years.
- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for people under 65 years.
- My Aged Care for people over 65 years.
- National Companion Card.
- Travel subsidies (your state government website covers more details).

For more information, visit our resources on [government subsidies](#).

Support to continue working

If you're employed, a change to your vision does not necessarily mean you need to stop working as there is equipment and other supports on offer to support you to stay employed. It is also unlawful for an employer to discriminate against anyone based on their disability.

Depending on your role, it is okay for you to expect your employer to make reasonable adjustments to your workplace, enabling you to still undertake your position.

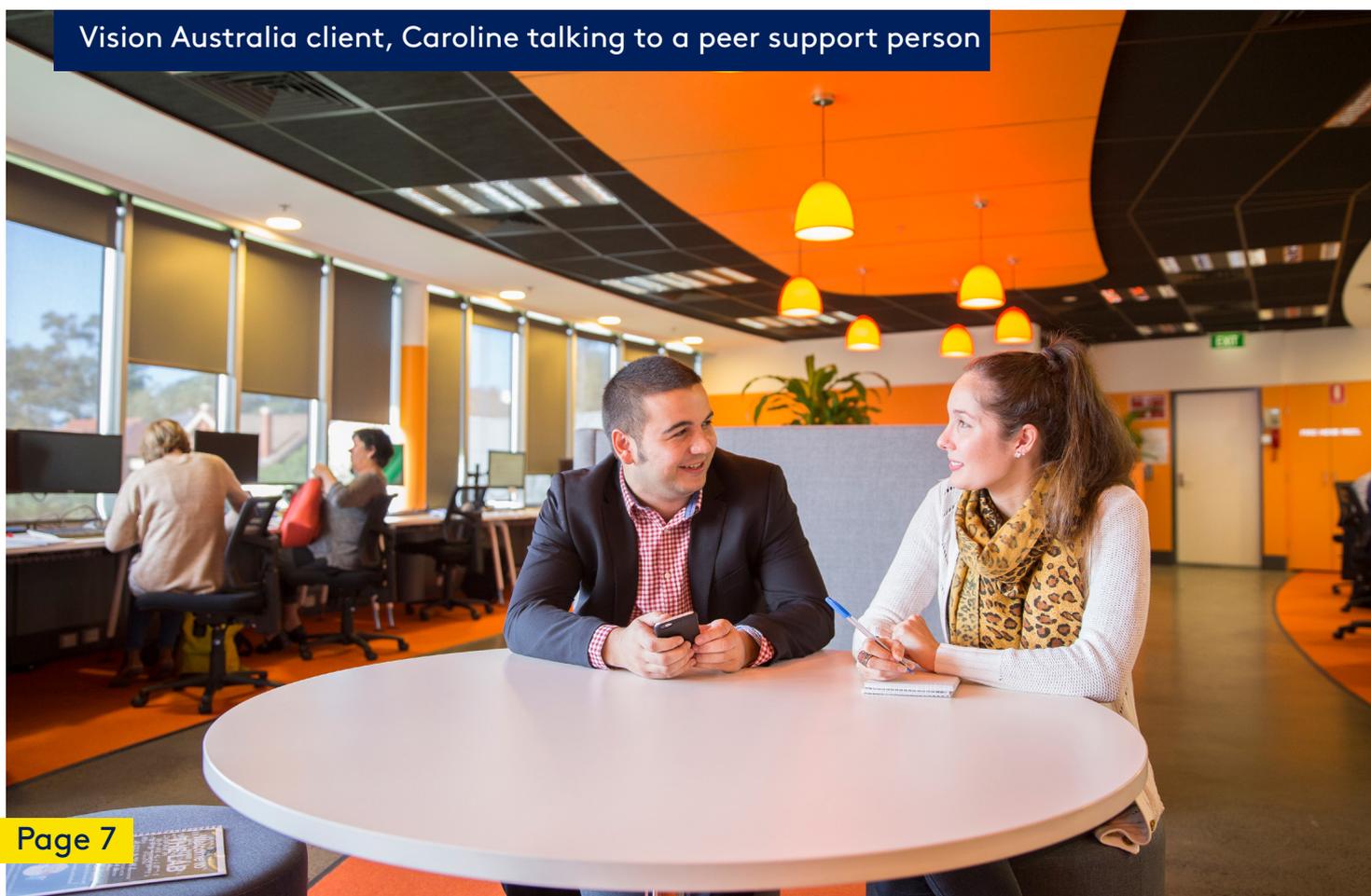
For more information, check out our [advocacy resources](#).

Job Access

You may benefit from [Job Access](#), which is a government initiative that provides funding to eligible people with disability and employers to buy work related modifications and equipment.

For more information, contact Vision Australia employment services or our advocacy team on 1300 847 466 or email info@visionaustralia.org.

Vision Australia client, Caroline talking to a peer support person



Vision Australia Library

The Vision Australia Library is available to anyone who is blind or has low vision and is an Australian permanent resident. There are thousands of audio books, braille books and magazines available. All Australian newspapers are uploaded daily in audio to give you the latest headlines.

To sign up, fill out the Vision Australia Library membership application [form](#).

Britnee,
Vision Australia client



Life hacks

If you're new to blindness or low vision, everyday tasks like cooking, grocery shopping or even showering, might feel impossible.

Our short [life hacks](#) videos feature people at different stages of vision loss who have been in your shoes, and in their own time, decided to get support.

Their simple tips on doing everyday tasks might benefit you.

Tip:

If you decide to attend a quality living group or get specialist support from us, you will learn a range of simple ways to live independently that are suited to your needs.

Watch life hacks [here](#).

Measuring tape with large numbers



Guide checklist

This section offers a list of things to help you figure out what's right for you.

- Learn more about your eye condition including what to expect and treatments involved.
- Keep in check with how you're really feeling.
 - Talk to your GP.
 - Talk to a psychologist or counsellor.
- Connect and learn from others experiencing vision loss.
- Write a list of services and supports that could help your life, Think about your home, job, hobbies – it's entirely up to you.
- Register with My Aged Care or the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) to learn if you can apply for funding to pay for the services and supports you need.
- Register for the other subsidies that you are eligible for.

We know there's a lot to take in. If there's anything on this list that's of interest to you and you're after more information, call us on 1300 84 74 66 or email info@visionaustralia.org.