

MEDIA RELEASE

Optometry is leading the new future of eye health in Vietnam

Hanoi, Vietnam, 20 August 2019: Today marks an historic day for Hanoi Medical University (HMU) and its School of Optometry, as the first graduating class of optometrists complete their degree. The HMU cohort of 43 optometry graduates join their 12 newly qualified colleagues from the University of Medicine Pham Ngoc Thach (UPNT), in a growing workforce of locally-trained optometrists.

A few years ago in 2013, there were only three qualified optometrists practising in Vietnam to serve a population of 90 million. Today the population is close to 94 million and there are an estimated 21 million Vietnamese people requiring eye care services who do not have access an optometrist, eye examinations or glasses!

Together the 55 new graduates define Vietnam's pioneering generation of optometrists who are ready to serve as eye care professionals for their population. This stream of locally-trained optometrists is being fuelled by more than 300 optometry students enrolled in the four-year program between the two inaugural schools of optometry HMU and UPNT.

Hanoi Medical University is a large and oldest University in Vietnam and was established in 1902. Although it has a long tradition of producing high quality medical doctors, it is also in the forefront of modernisation and development of medical education in Vietnam. HMU is embracing and supporting the new profession of optometry for Vietnam.

Brien Holden Vision Institute with support through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program, was integral to launching its first optometry degree. This exciting inception was piloted in 2014 at the University of Medicine Pham Ngoc Thach (UPNT) in Ho Chi Minh City – a joint venture between the Institute, UPNT and Ho Chi Minh City Eye Hospital. One year later in 2015, a parallel program followed suit in the north at Hanoi Medical University (HMU).

By 2020 there will be more than 150 qualified optometrists to serve the growing population – an outcome which has been implemented by Brien Holden Vision Institute and our dedicated partners, supported through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program. This is a crucial step towards achieving the World Health Organization's recommendation of at least one optometrist for every 50,000 people by 2020 and bridging the sizable gap in eye care service provision in Vietnam.

"Our eye care prevalence show very high uncorrected refractive error rates of 11.4% particularly in the 50+ age group. In fact the figures showed that 10.5 million people over the age of 50 years did not have the glasses they needed for near vision. A recent research study conducted in Vietnam found that 21.4% of school children have uncorrected refractive errors in some regions," said Ms Huynh Phuong Ly, Country Representative, Brien Holden Vision Institute.

Brien Holden Vision Institutes strategy is to eliminate avoidable blindness due to uncorrected refractive error in Vietnam by developing workforce infrastructure through optometry and policy change by participating in writing the national eye care plans with the ministries, peak and global bodies.

We gratefully thank all the individuals, organisations and funders such as Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Optometry Giving Sight for all the continuing support. The big aim is to help everyone, everywhere across the nation get access to the eye care and the glasses they need to allow their futures to be full of opportunity.



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About Brien Holden Vision Institute Foundation

Brien Holden Vision Institute Foundation is a global non-profit, non-governmental organisation who since 1998 has delivered sustainable eye care services, education and training programs in over 60 countries, providing eye care to over 13 million people at more than 400 eye care sites and training 250,000 eye care personnel.

We believe sight is a fundamental right for everyone, everywhere. Globally there are 1.2 billion people who are blind or vision impaired because they don't have access to eye care. Our mission is to develop solutions for vision care and eliminate vision impairment and avoidable blindness, thereby reducing poverty and suffering.

References

ⁱ Flaxman et al. Global causes of blindness and distance vision impairment 1990–2020: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Lancet Global Health. Published online October 11, 2017 [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(17\)30393-5](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(17)30393-5)