



## **Media Statement**

**Wednesday, July 27, 2016**

### **Lions Eye Bank celebrates 30 years of saving sight.**

Almost 4500 Western Australians have special reason to celebrate the Lions Eye Bank's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

They have been the recipients of sight-saving corneal transplants through the Eye Bank – the only facility in Western Australia that collects, processes and distributes eye tissue for transplantation.

The Lions Eye Bank was established in 1986 by the Lions Eye Institute, with support from the Lions Save-Sight Foundation, to help people with conditions that require corneal transplants such as keratoconus.

“For people with a range of usually inherited diseases, a corneal transplant is the only way to save their sight,” Eye Bank Director Dr Steve Wiffen said.

“Keratoconus usually emerges in people during their teens and 20s, so the emotional, social and economic impact can be devastating.”

The Lions Eye Bank's first Medical Director, Professor Geoffrey Crawford, trained in corneal transplantation in the United States.

Although well-established in the US, there was nothing similar in Western Australia at the time.

“Before 1986, the whole process of collecting donor tissue was extremely difficult,” he said.

“There were no donor registers and no coordinated system of alerting doctors to the availability of donor tissue. Tissue also couldn’t be preserved so it had to be used within 24 hours.

“The logistics of getting family permission to take tissue, transporting it to the hospital, getting access to a theatre and lining up patients and medical staff in that timeline was very challenging.

“The result was that the waiting list for donor corneas was very long with patients waiting up to two years.”

Dr Wiffen said new storage methods and advances in corneal surgery had transformed eye banking since then.

“Back then, only one type of graft – penetrating keratoplasty – was offered, regardless of which part of the cornea was diseased,” he said.

“Thirty years later it is a completely different story with donated tissue able to be stored for up to a month and virtually no waiting times for surgery.

“State-of-the-art surgical techniques have evolved so only the diseased portion of the cornea is replaced, shortening the recovery period and improving visual outcomes for the patient.”

The Lions Eye Bank’s 30th anniversary is being celebrated throughout the month of July. Recipients, their family members and former and current Eye Bank staff are being encouraged to take a selfie and share their story at #savingsight430, [www.facebook.com/lionseyebankWA](http://www.facebook.com/lionseyebankWA) or email [eyebank@lei.org.au](mailto:eyebank@lei.org.au)

The celebrations are being held in the run up to DonateLife Week 2016, from July 31 to August 7, with its theme ***What are you waiting for?***

The campaign is encouraging Australians to register as an organ donor. To find out more, visit [www.donatelife.gov.au](http://www.donatelife.gov.au)

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