



Friday 10 February 2006

## Press Release

### Australian First to Save Sight

A new system of storing eye tissue, to be launched on **Tuesday 14 February** at the Lions Corneal Donation Service (LCDS), will help save the sight of hundreds of Victorians a year by extending the time between donation and needing to perform the transplant.

Thanks to the new facilities, LCDS can now store corneas at human body temperature levels (34C) for up to a whole month. Previously, corneas were held at low temperatures and had to be transplanted within one week of the donation.

Dr Graeme Pollock, Director of the Lions Corneal Donation Service, said no other corneal donation facility in Australia offered this kind of service.

"Our ability to store the corneas for longer means reduced surgery postponements and waiting time for people living with vision loss," Dr Pollock said.

Corneal recipient Dorothy O'Kane, 61, welcomed the news after initially missing an opportunity for a corneal transplant when she was on holiday in South Australia.

"If this system had been in place at that time I could have come back and the cornea would have still been there for me," Mrs O'Kane said.

Mrs O'Kane, who eventually underwent a transplant in July 2005, said the improvement in her sight was remarkable, enabling her to enjoy life to the full.

"I can even see the freckles on my grandson's nose."

The new system is being launched in the lead up to Organ Donor Awareness Week to encourage people to consider corneal donation to save the sight of others.

The Lions Corneal Donation Service will be officially opened with a press conference at **10.15am on Tuesday 14 February 2006, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor Smorgan Family Wing, The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, 32 Gisborne St, East Melbourne (due to renovations please enter via Morrison Place).**

**Interviews will be available with corneal recipient Dorothy O'Kane (61) and Iola Matthews (62), who is due to undergo her first corneal transplant on Thursday.**

**There is also an opportunity to film an operation of a corneal transplant at the Eye and Ear hospital on Tuesday following the opening.**

The Lions Corneal Donation Service, supported by the Victorian and New South Wales Lions Foundation is a division of the Centre for Eye Research Australia is housed at The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital in East Melbourne.

If you want to donate your corneas you must tell your family and register on the organ donor register. For information on donating your corneas please contact Graeme Pollock on 03 9929 8709. We urge Australia to consider giving the gift of sight and donate your corneas.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**

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