With the number of people aged 60 or over expected to reach two billion by the mid-21st century, healthy ageing strategies are vital to reducing pressure on health care services, particularly in low and middle income countries.

In 2012, The Fred Hollows Foundation established a partnership with Burnet Institute to study the critical role blindness prevention plays within healthy ageing strategies. The aim of the study is to show how simple initiatives can impact on people’s lives and address eye conditions including cataract, diabetic retinopathy and macular degeneration. The results are expected to provide a blueprint for a sustainable and affordable healthy ageing strategy that incorporates blindness prevention in countries where there is an increasingly ageing population.

**Ageing, blindness and poverty**

Over 80 per cent of the 32.4 million people worldwide who are blind are aged 50 or over. This makes vision loss the leading cause of age-related disability. Good sight enables a better quality of life and allows older people to continue to play an active role in their communities. Blindness and vision loss can cause social isolation, mental and physical health problems and push entire families into poverty. This increases the burden of care on families, especially women and children.

**Better Vision, Healthy Ageing Program**

| 82% | Percentage of the world’s 32.4 million people who are blind aged over 50 |
| 1 in 4 | People in Sri Lanka will be elderly by 2041. Sri Lanka will have the oldest average population in South Asia. |

Blindness prevents people from working. Thanks to the Better Vision, Healthy Ageing program, Elders’ Club members can receive a free eye test to identify blinding conditions such as cataract. After sight-restoring surgery, older people can start small businesses like the thriving screen-printing business established by the Sahana Elders’ Group which generates income for the Club.

**Want to know more?**

- Visit [hollows.org.au](http://hollows.org.au), [burnet.edu.au](http://burnet.edu.au)
- Like The Fred Hollows Foundation and Burnet Institute on Facebook
- Follow us on Twitter @FredHollows or @BurnetInstitute
The Fred Hollows Foundation is an international development organisation, focusing on blindness prevention and Australian Indigenous health. We are inspired by the life and work of Professor Fred Hollows (1929-1993), an internationally acclaimed eye surgeon and an activist for social justice who championed the right of all people to high quality and affordable eye care and good health.

The Fred Hollows Foundation - our work so far

- Working to restore sight in over 19 countries
- Over eight million eye operations, treatments and procedures in 2012 in conjunction with partners
- Priorities include cataract and refractive errors, which are more common amongst older people.
- Working with Burnet Institute in Sri Lanka to learn how to strengthen systems to improve vision, health and wellbeing.

Working with the Australian Government

Professor Fred Hollows was a quintessential Australian. The values that he displayed in his life are reflected throughout our society - those of a ‘fair go’ for all and generosity towards those less fortunate. With the support of the Australian people through the Federal Government, The Fred Hollows Foundation has been working for two decades to continue Fred’s work. In 2012 The Foundation worked across 19 countries to support over 400,000 sight restoring treatments and procedures, trained more than 40,000 health workers and surgeons and provided two million eye screenings.

Elders’ Clubs

The establishment of special clubs for community elders has been key to creating a unique environment to encourage healthy ageing. Residents from tea estates in the Nuwara Eliya District are central to the project, which has the support of the Ministry of Health and Vision2020 Sri Lanka. Elders’ Clubs enable easy access to eye screening, health care services, health promotion activities and community engagement. Over 180 clubs have been established since the program began in 2012.

Investing in vision

A landmark study by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and supported by The Fred Hollows Foundation, has shown the economic benefits of eliminating avoidable blindness in developing countries outweigh the costs by a factor of four to one. This places treating blindness among the most effective interventions available, alongside primary education in terms of broader economic value.

LEADING SOCIAL CHANGE

Elders’ Clubs are already influencing public health policy in Sri Lanka. After seeing the effectiveness and popularity of the Elders’ Clubs, The Mayor of Nuwara Eliya has said he is determined to develop the town as an ‘Elderly Friendly City.’ He wants to make sure roads, paths and public buildings are more accessible to older people.

The Fred Hollows Foundation is an international development organisation, focusing on blindness prevention and Australian Indigenous health. We are inspired by the life and work of Professor Fred Hollows (1929-1993), an internationally acclaimed eye surgeon and an activist for social justice who championed the right of all people to high quality and affordable eye care and good health.