

# Sight + Sound

THE EYE AND EAR NEWS AUTUMN 2025



## Hospital news

Governor of Victoria visits the hospital

## Our People

Meet Xavier, recipient of the 2024 Patient Experience Award

## Patient chronicles

Bailey's journey with childhood glaucoma

The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital is committed to achieving equality in health status between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians. We acknowledge that the land we meet and work upon is the traditional lands of the Kulin Nation. We value the diversity and strength of our people and communities.



2

Hospital news



4

The difference you make



6

Our people



7

Patient chronicles



↑ Eye and Ear donors attending the hospital's Annual General Meeting in December 2024.



↑ Young Bailey, following one of his surgical procedures for childhood glaucoma. Read his story on page 7.

# Welcome to Sight + Sound



As we settle into 2025, I'm pleased to be sharing the autumn edition of Sight + Sound. At the end of last year, Bailey's story was the focus of our Christmas appeal. I want to thank every person who supported us, with almost \$40,000 donated. You can read this young man's extraordinary story on page 7.

Our people make all the difference at the Eye and Ear. We have lifelong connections with staff, patients and volunteers. In this edition of Sight + Sound we share some of these special stories with you. From John Hawkins, who completed his ophthalmology training at the hospital in 1956, to the late Fay Bathgate who was Nurse Matron from 1964 to 1989, the Eye and Ear is a special place. You can read how both John and Fay have supported the hospital so generously. You can also find out more about one of our 2024 Patient Experience Award winners, Xavier Reyes.

Our Annual General Meeting was held in December, and I invite you to attend in future. It's a great opportunity to hear from hospital staff, see the progress we are making, and stay connected with us.

With an exciting year ahead, I encourage you to explore the many ways you can get involved with us. I want to call out and thank our 80 volunteers and consumer advisors who helped everyone who stepped through our doors in 2024.

**“With an exciting year ahead, I encourage you to explore the many ways you can get involved with us.”**

You may have met them at our Concierge Desk, as they welcome patients and help them find their way around the hospital. They also help behind the scenes too, including in our Philanthropy and Fundraising team and on Consumer Advisory Committees. Peter's story (page 9) is an example of how people who come through our doors become part of our family, volunteering and donating to keep our hospital the special place that it is.

**Brendon Gardner**  
Chief Executive Officer

# Hospital news



## Celebrating our bequestors

We were thrilled to welcome some Eye and Ear bequestors for a morning tea at our hospital in November. CEO Brendon Gardner spent time meeting supporters and sharing about the hospital's impact and future plans. It was wonderful to have a chance to thank these supporters for their recent (and in many cases long-term) donations to the hospital, and for

their intention to leave gifts in their Wills for the hospital. You can see the impact donations, including bequests, made to the Eye and Ear on page 4. If you have included a gift to the hospital in your Will, or you'd like information about how to do so, please get in touch with us at 1800 808 137 or [fundraising@eyeandear.org.au](mailto:fundraising@eyeandear.org.au).

## Annual General Meeting (AGM)

We held the Eye and Ear Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 10 December, where we heard from keynote speaker, Associate Professor Anne Brooks AM. Associate Professor Brooks reflected on her 40-year history with the hospital, providing inspiring insights from her experience over the decades. We also launched our Annual Report 2023-2024, which you can find on our website at: <https://eyeandear.org.au/about/publications/>. If you want to watch the recording of the keynote address and the full AGM, or you'd like to attend future AGMs, our team can help. Get in touch with us at [fundraising@eyeandear.org.au](mailto:fundraising@eyeandear.org.au) or call us 1800 808 137.





## Christmas holidays at the Eye and Ear

The Eye and Ear's Emergency Department is open every day of the year, with Christmas Day and the holiday season being no exception. Between Christmas and New Year's Day 2024, 38 staff worked and 1030 patients presented to our Emergency Department in need of urgent specialist eye, ear, nose or throat care. The top reasons people needed care included otitis externa (an ear infection otherwise known as 'Swimmer's Ear'), corneal abrasion (a scratch on the surface of the clear part of the eye due to trauma or injury) and posterior vitreous detachment (a separation between the gel that fills the eyeball from the retina).



## Governor of Victoria visits the Eye and Ear

We were delighted to host the 30th Governor of Victoria, Her Excellency Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC, for a tour of the hospital in February. She toured the newly renovated Education Precinct where state of the art facilities provide our specialists with the ability to refine practical and theoretical skills. She met with Dr Thomas Edwards and learnt about the Eye and Ear's groundbreaking gene therapy work. Professor Stephen O'Leary shared with her surgical training models and demonstrated specialist cochlear implant testing techniques. Dr Rebecca Haward also shared how our hospital is leading the training of ophthalmologists and ENT specialists in Australia and globally. As Patron, this was Her Excellency's first visit since her inauguration in 2023.

## Are you or your loved ones using eye drops correctly?

Many patients struggle with putting in eye drops correctly – they might not know the best technique, or they might struggle with precise hand tasks, so they miss the eye, use too many drops or don't wait long enough between drops. The World Association of Eye Hospitals and The Louis and Lesley Nelken Trust Fund funded a handy video that we developed to help you get the right technique and make the most of your eye drop medication. You can scan the QR code to watch the video now. Please share the link with your friends or family who use eye drops.



# The difference you make

Here's a snapshot of what donated funds have been used for lately, and how your support is making a real difference.



## 1 x bone cutting device

When someone has a broken nose, or skin cancer that has caused scars or damage to the nose or face, this bone cutting device helps our specialists to cut and shape the bone in surgery. Funded by Annie Danks Trust.



## 4 x infusion pumps

Our Emergency Department relies on infusion pumps to deliver medication, fluids and vital nutrients to patients when they need it most. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we have four new infusion pumps ready to support our doctors and nurses to rapidly respond in emergencies.



## 4 x surgical drills

Trainee surgeons, surgeons, nurses and allied health professionals need hands on training to increase their skills in different aspects of ear surgery. These surgical drills will give our team the ability to simulate different surgical scenarios, like temporal bone drilling. Funded by Joe White Bequest.

# We are so

“The Emergency Department has benefited a lot from donated funds. Recently we were able to purchase four infusion pumps and some video goggles used for the diagnosis and treatment of balance conditions such as vestibular migraines. These equipment items are really a great help for our patients. Thank you to everyone who donates to the hospital.”



**Deborah Digman, Nurse Unit Manager in the Emergency Department**



### 1 x surgical headlight box

At the Eye and Ear, we specialise in complex eye, ear, nose and throat surgery. This surgical headlight box helps our surgeons see clearly in these small, intricate areas. We often see emergencies where a fish or chicken bone is stuck in a patient's throat. In fact, we see at least 100 of these emergencies each year. The surgical headlight box provides the best lighting for emergency surgery like this. Funded by The Eirene Lucas Foundation.



### Noel and Imelda Foster Awards

The Noel and Imelda Foster Awards are given each year to a Registrar or Fellow who shows outstanding leadership and contribution. At our 2024 AGM, Dr Phoebe Ramos Yanine and Dr Vivian Kuang were awarded this prestigious honour. Their names will be displayed alongside previous winners on a plaque outside the Surgical Skills Lab. We are grateful for the legacy the Fosters created through this Gift in Will.



### Donated slit lamp

The hospital recently received a donation of a slit lamp, a diagnostic tool used by ophthalmologists to examine the eye. The lamp was donated by John Hawkins, aged 98. John was an ophthalmologist who was a resident for 18 months at the Eye and Ear from 1961. He had an ophthalmology practice in Ballarat for 25 years and later in Coffs Harbour. The lamp will be used in the hospital's specialist clinics to conduct eye examinations. Slit lamps have a very long service life and many ophthalmologists prefer using the older styles of lamps.

# grateful!

# Our people

The heart of the Eye and Ear



“We’re not just taking care of the patients, but we also take care of the carers. Because the carers have been waiting a long time for the patient to recover and go back home. It’s just a small gesture for us to offer them a cup of coffee and update them with what’s happening.”

**Xavier Reyes, Nurse**

Xavier Reyes is one of the nurses in our Surgical Admissions and Recovery (SAR) team. Xavier was recognised as a winner of the 2024 Patient Experience Award, after regularly receiving compliments from the patients he cares for. He understands the daunting prospect of undergoing surgery and takes a holistic approach, not just for his patients, but also for their families.

**Q: Can you tell us a little about your role at the hospital?**

A: I’m a part of the peri-operative nursing team in Surgical Admissions and Recovery. I have been working at the Eye and Ear for six years. I have been working as a nurse for 11 years.

**Q: What do you find most rewarding about your job?**

A: To be able to prepare and assist patients for their surgery. Being able to help patients understand what is happening and manage their expectations during their surgical journey.

**Q: What is the most exciting part of your job?**

A: To see my patients have their surgery and recover. Patients will be having both eyes done and when they come back for another procedure and they remember me, that I provided great nursing care, that gives me a sense of achievement.

**Q: What motivates you at work?**

A: My main motivation at work is how will I be able to leave a good impression on each of my patients so that they will receive the utmost care that they deserve.

**Q: Who inspires you?**

A: A lot of people – mainly my own family, and my colleagues and my friends. Also, my manager Mitch is always there to support me.



# Patient chronicles

“I am so overwhelmed by the number of people who donated so generously for the Christmas 2024 appeal to support children like our son Bailey to have sight saving surgery! Thank you for supporting the Eye and Ear hospital to be able to give future families and children like Bailey the gift of sight.”

**Nina, Bailey’s mum**

Last Christmas, we shared Bailey’s story with some of our supporters. Bailey has been a part of our hospital family nearly his whole life, since he was diagnosed with childhood glaucoma at three months old.

We want to thank our donors for your generosity in response to our Christmas appeal. Bailey wants to be a pilot when he grows up. This ambition would not have been possible without your support or the sight-saving surgery and care he has had at the Eye and Ear.

As a very young baby, Bailey’s mum noticed something a bit different about his eyes. Within a day of taking him to their local GP, Bailey was facing emergency surgery to save his sight.

When a child develops glaucoma, high pressure builds up in the eye. The higher the pressure, the more quickly the damage occurs. That’s why quick diagnosis and treatment is so critical.

Dr Jon Ruddle leads the Eye and Ear’s Ocular Genetics Clinic and works in the Glaucoma Investigation and Research Unit. He has been Bailey’s doctor since that first surgery 14 years ago.

“Once you have glaucoma as a child, regardless of how it’s caused, you need lifelong eye care and ongoing monitoring of your intraocular eye pressure,” says Dr Ruddle.



Bailey has had eight surgeries so far. We have been there for him - and will continue to be - to keep his sight healthy.

While the surgeries helped control the glaucoma Bailey was diagnosed with, a side effect was the development of early onset cataracts, which required additional surgery when he was three years old.

“For the first five years of his life, Bailey saw Dr Ruddle more than any of his extended family,” Bailey’s mum Nina says.

Bailey’s story shows what a team effort every patient’s diagnosis and treatment is. Surgeons and anaesthetists, ward and Emergency staff and skilled nurses are all involved in keeping children like him seeing well.

Nina’s words sum up the impact of the lifelong care they received at our hospital.

“I feel incredibly lucky that we’ve had access to excellent medical support and a high standard of care. I don’t think many people realise how lucky we are in Australia to have access to paediatric ophthalmology.”

# Supporters in the spotlight

The people and partners contributing to our hospital



## Fay Bathgate – Nursing Matron with the hospital always at heart

In April 2023 we received the sad news of the passing of Fay Bathgate at the age of 95. Fay was a Matron and later Director of Nursing at the Eye and Ear between 1964 and 1989.

Fay became Matron at only 36 years old. At the time it was considered quite unusual for someone so young to hold such a senior role, which is a testament to Fay's abilities.

Fay was a pioneer of person-centred care. She understood the important role family and friends provide in supporting holistic patient care, and in response to this, she introduced continuous visiting hours. She was both a mentor and advocate for her nursing staff, challenging and modernising many traditional nursing practices.

We are humbled to announce that Fay left a generous bequest to the hospital. The gift is for medical and nursing research. We look forward to seeing the impact Fay's legacy gift will have on eye and ear research over the decades to come.

## Your regular giving supports our hospital's future

The hospital benefits greatly from the regularity and predictability of monthly gifts – enabling us to plan for the future and provide the best possible care and treatment for our patients.

Peter Tragjasi is one of those generous donors who is part of our monthly giving program. He also volunteers at the hospital. We spoke with Peter about his experience.

### Q: Can you tell us about your first experience with the Eye and Ear?

A: During COVID I visited the Emergency Department at the Eye and Ear twice, resulting in vitrectomy (removing fluid from the eye) and cataract procedures to the right eye. Since 2012 I have worn hearing aids upon losing my hearing gradually over a lifetime.

### Q: Why do you choose to donate monthly to the Eye and Ear?

A: For quite a while I would give the occasional donation to a select few organisations, including the Eye and Ear, but I didn't keep up with the amounts and frequency. In fairness to all, I decided it was important to streamline the process and make regular monthly contributions.

### Q: What motivated you to sign up as a volunteer?

A: I retired in 2022 and decided to try something completely different to remain engaged with the wider community. At the Eye and Ear, I'm now volunteering at Concierge, welcoming patients when they arrive at the hospital and helping them find their way to their appointments. I have found this emotionally rewarding. I find that I can, at times, draw warmth and strength from people I engage with, particularly strangers, however briefly.



**Q: What message would you like to pass on to people who are thinking about supporting the hospital in any way?**

**A:** For me, assisting people in any way who are vulnerable, or otherwise, is the most satisfying gift I'm pleased to offer. Of course, if you're able to donate to the hospital, please do! The hospital makes a great difference, and we can all do our bit to help it along.

A small monthly contribution can go a long way here at the hospital. Monthly donors receive invites to hospital events; are appointed a personal point of contact within the Philanthropy and Fundraising team; and receive an annual tax-deductible receipt.

To sign up as a monthly donor, you can head to our website <https://donate.eyeandear.org.au> or contact us on 1800 808 137 or [fundraising@eyeandear.org.au](mailto:fundraising@eyeandear.org.au).

# In your words

Here's what some of our donors told us recently about why they support the hospital:

**"The Eye and Ear does vital work for people with hearing problems and eye problems. Vitally needed!"**

Brenda

**"We bought our 5-year-old daughter to the Emergency Department because she injured her eye. She is now 44 and we've been supporting the hospital ever since."**

Sally

**"I give in memory of my husband, who was looked after by the Eye and Ear."**

Iris

**"Your staff are phenomenal! The effort and care your staff put into their jobs is just so wonderful. From triage staff to nursing - and then to the Doctor who helped my partner with a blocked ear, this was just a great experience. Your hospital should be really proud of the people who work for you."**

Lisa

# YES, I would like to give the gift of Sight + Sound by donating today.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Donor ID (If known): \_\_\_\_\_

Please tell us what motivated you to give  
or email us at [fundraising@eyeandear.org.au](mailto:fundraising@eyeandear.org.au)

Please accept my once-off donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

OR, I wish to make a monthly gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

via: (please tick)  MasterCard  Money order  
(payable to The  
Royal Victorian Eye  
and Ear Hospital)

VISA  Cheque

Card no: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Cardholder's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please email my receipt

## Ways to donate:



Please tear off this coupon and return in the reply paid envelope.



<https://donate.eyeandear.org.au/> or scan the QR code.



Call us on 1800 808 137 to make a payment over the phone.



Donate via the cashier in the main hospital foyer.



Please send me information about including a gift to the Eye and Ear in my Will.



I have already included a gift to the Eye and Ear in my Will.

All donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.



I do not wish to receive further communication from The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital.





Give  
the gift  
of Sight +  
Sound




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Cover photo: Xavier Reyes, one of the 2024 Patient Experience Award winners. Photo by Anna Carlile

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You can view our Philanthropy and Fundraising Privacy Statement online:  
<https://eyeandear.org.au/philanthropy-and-fundraising-privacy-statement>.

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