



North Shore Eye Centre

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## WHAT IS VISUAL DISABILITY AND IMPAIRMENT? WHAT IS LEGAL BLINDNES

### What is visual impairment?

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People are considered visually impaired if they do not have normal vision even with eyeglasses or contact lenses. Visual impairment can be caused by several eye diseases such as age related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, cataracts (condition where the lens of the eye gradually becomes hard and opaque) and glaucoma (abnormally high pressure of fluid inside the eyeball, resulting in disturbance of vision). You may also experience vision loss that cannot be medically corrected after accidents or inherited ocular disorders.

You may be defined as visually impaired if neither of your eyes can see better than 6/9 without correction from eyeglasses or contact lenses. This also applies to limited side vision, abnormal colour vision, double vision and loss of vision in one eye.

### What is legal blindness?

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A certain level of visual impairment is defined as legal blindness. Legal blindness is not to be confused with total blindness as most of the people defined as legally blind retain some useful vision. You are considered legally blind when your best corrected central visual acuity in your *better* eye is 6/60 or worse, or your side vision is 20 degrees or less in your *better* eye.

### What is visual disability?

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*Figure 1 – Normal vision and visual disability*

People are usually visually disabled if they are unable to perform certain tasks because of their visual impairment. Visual disability is expressed in percentage and therefore an exact rating or qualification of the disability is necessary to receive certain benefits or compensations.



## What is visual acuity?

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It is the ability to see objects clearly and visual acuity is measured using an eye chart. The results of the eye chart are recorded as a pair of numbers. The first number is the testing distance measured in metres and the second number is the distance from which a normal eye should see the letter clearly. For example, a person with a visual acuity of 6/9 can only see at 6m letters which a normal eye can identify at 9m. Thus, the larger the second number, the lower your visual acuity, as in a fraction.

## What is side vision?

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Normal eyes can recognise objects over an area measuring at least 140 degrees. A person with a much narrower range of side vision may have trouble in recognising objects coming from the side, even though the central vision is excellent.

Your ophthalmologist can perform certain tests to identify visual conditions and describe their severity.

## How to behave if you have visual impairment?

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- Ask your ophthalmologist whether the impairment is temporary, stable or likely to progress
- Have regular checkups with your ophthalmologist as your eye disorder may change and so that new problems can be detected and treated promptly
- Make use of rehabilitation programs
- Make use of agencies specialised in helping visually disabled people to receive workers' compensation, insurance disability benefits, legal claims, or certain forms of government assistance

Royal Blind Society  
4 Mitchell Street  
Enfield NSW 2136  
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- Join local support groups