

VISION FOR THE COMMONWEALTH

Dear Commonwealth Leaders,

In the week beginning 16 April you will gather in London and Windsor for the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. The theme of your meeting is “Towards a common future”, focusing on delivering a more prosperous, secure, sustainable and fair future for all the Commonwealth’s citizens.

There are 85 million people in the Commonwealth today who are blind or have very poor vision. Many millions more struggle with bad eyesight.

Yet thanks to advances in science and technology, four out of five people who are blind do not need to be: there are straightforward, tried and tested means to prevent or treat many types of blindness. And for those many people with poor eyesight, often all they need is an eye test and a simple pair of glasses.

Good eyesight transforms lives, releasing people’s potential to learn, to work and to enjoy all that life has to offer, whoever they are and wherever they live. Local economies benefit, accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Commonwealth countries in every region are taking resolute action to bring vision to all. In many places where the disease blinding trachoma is still endemic, it is being tackled with vigour and nearing elimination. Countries are implementing their own pioneering approaches to improve eye health achieving excellent results.

Universal, accessible eye health services can be achieved with catalytic financing. This supports an initial investment, bringing a huge long-term return in increased productivity and reduced health and social care costs. Botswana is trialling this approach. It is set to become the first country to offer comprehensive eye health to every school child and teacher, transforming the prospects of an entire generation. Funders, civil society, public and private sector organisations are working together to develop a financing instrument that will be available to all countries to support expansion of universal eye health services led by governments.

While much has been achieved in improving eye health, the battle is far from won. The population of the Commonwealth is increasing and ageing. Without

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bold action now the number of people who are blind and with poor eyesight is set to triple by 2050.

That is why we are calling upon you to address vision at your upcoming meeting. To commit to accessible eye health for all the people of the Commonwealth. And for your country to take one significant step towards it before you meet again in 2020.

The tools are there. We know that they work. Now is the time to act.

The Commonwealth can lead the world in bringing vision to everyone, everywhere.

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