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Australia invests $35 M to build manufacturing facility for artificial corneas

February 7, 2024 | News

Over 2000 Australians every year require a corneal tissue transplant to restore their vision



The University of Sydney will receive $35 million through the Medical Research Future Fund of the Australian government to establish a manufacturing facility that can produce, store and ship bioengineered corneas across Australia and the world.

The funding is part of $700 million over 10 years the government has allocated to ensure Australia remains a world leader in medical research.

BIENCO is a world-first consortium of clinical, scientific and governance experts from the University of Sydney, University of Wollongong, University of Melbourne, Queensland University of Technology (QUT), the Centre for Eye Research Australia, and the NSW Organ & Tissue Donation Service (OTDS). It is developing a bioengineered corneal replacement tissue by incorporating cells and tissue generously donated by deceased donors.

Corneal disease is the third most common form of blindness and over 10 million are on a waiting list for a corneal transplant. BIENCO programme lead Professor Gerard Sutton from the University of Sydney said the condition has a profound impact on people’s lives and presents a significant cost to the health system.

“We believe this is the largest grant for eye research in Australia’s history,” said Professor Sutton, corneal specialist at the University of Sydney's Save Sight Institute and previous medical director of the NSW Tissue Bank, OTDS.