Seeing Longer, Living Healthier: Roche’s Plan to Transform Vision Health in Asia-Pacific



There is a strong case for embedding vision more intentionally within national strategies and care models

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Asia Pacific bears the world’s heaviest burden of vision loss, accounting for two-thirds of all moderate-to-severe impairment. With ageing populations and rising diabetes prevalence driving the trend, millions face preventable blindness despite most cases being manageable through early detection and treatment. Against this backdrop, Ahmed Elhusseiny, Area Head for Roche Pharma Asia Pacific, discusses how the company is working with regional partners to close the prevention gap, ease health system pressures, and advance innovation that helps people see longer and live healthier lives.

Roche recently conducted the APAC Vision Health Survey, with the Asia Pacific Vitreo-retina Society (APVRS) and co-hosted the webinar Turning Insights into Action: Advancing Vision Health in Asia Pacific. Why now, and what were some of the key learnings?

Asia Pacific carries two-thirds of the world’s moderate-to-severe vision impairment. That burden is growing rapidly, driven by an ageing population and rising diabetes prevalence. Yet most of this vision loss is preventable with early detection and treatment.

That’s why we partnered with APVRS to launch the APAC Vision Health Survey and convene a cross-sector dialogue through the *“Turning Insights into Action – Advancing Vision Health in Asia Pacific”*

webinar. These efforts are part of a broader commitment to elevate vision health as a regional health priority.

The data is clear: while concern about eye health is high, uptake of preventive care is low. 91 percent of respondents worry about vision loss, but only 28 percent get annual eye checks. The gap is even more stark for high-risk groups – nearly one-third of respondents with diabetes skip eye exams, despite having an elevated risk of vision impairment. Caregivers of visually impaired people are also carrying emotional, financial, and physical burdens – with 95 percent reporting significant challenges.

This disconnect has consequences. The annual global productivity loss from preventable vision impairment is over USD 410 billion. If we want to change that trajectory, we need greater awareness, earlier interventions, and more integrated care models. Our collaboration with APVRS was designed to spotlight this need and surface practical solutions.

How is Roche evolving its approach to support the entire patient journey in vision health beyond therapeutic interventions alone? How does Roche's innovation play a role in addressing the increasing pressure on vision health in APAC?

Our goal is simple: help people see longer and live healthier lives. Innovation plays a critical role in achieving that. And beyond scientific breakthroughs, we are equally focused on supporting the full patient journey, working to complement therapies with system partnerships, digital tools, and capacity-building initiatives that help translate innovation into real-world impact.

We are working to improve treatment durability and reduce injection frequency for patients with conditions like neovascular age-related macular degeneration (nAMD), polypoidal choroidal vasculopathy (PCV), and diabetic macular edema (DME) – helping to ease both individual burden and pressure on health systems. A recent WifOR study estimated that over seven years, such treatments generated an estimated USD 173 million in economic value and helped recover 1,500 Quality-Adjusted Life Years (QALYs). Projections suggest this could rise to over USD 6.3 billion by 2032.

But our focus on innovation extends beyond new therapies. We're also driving partnerships to address critical system gaps, whether it's supporting local workforce development or building capacity through initiatives like the Women in Ophthalmology and NextGen Retina forums.

Real change happens when insights, innovation, and partnerships come together. That's how Roche is working to advance vision health across Asia Pacific. Scientific progress enables us to do more, but collaboration ensures that innovation reaches patients, strengthens systems, and creates lasting value.

Diabetes and ageing significantly increase the risk of vision loss. How can the vision health community better support these high-risk groups?

We need to integrate vision care into broader chronic disease and ageing strategies. The APAC Vision Health Survey reflected a long-standing reality: nearly one in three people with diabetes skip the recommended annual eye exams, and fewer than six in ten adults over 60 get regular check-ups. There's still much for us to do together to address these missed opportunities that are driving avoidable blindness across the region.

For people living with diabetes, regular retinal screening is essential but uptake remains low due to a wide range of cost, access, and awareness barriers. That's why we're partnering with institutions like the Singapore Eye Research Institute to develop care models and research tailored to regional needs. This collaboration has contributed to new treatment approaches for retinal conditions like nAMD and DME, which are among the leading causes of vision loss in Asia Pacific.

At a systems level, we're advocating for prevention-first strategies, organised screening strategies, stronger early detection protocols, and streamlined referral pathways. This is particularly critical in ageing societies, where misconceptions about vision loss being inevitable can delay care. In reality, many age-related eye conditions are manageable if addressed early. Integrating vision care into non-communicable disease (NCD) frameworks is how we make that possible.

Based on the webinar, what areas of partnership have emerged as most impactful on improving vision health?

A clear message from the webinar was that partnerships focused on driving system-level change have the greatest impact. This means working with governments and all health system stakeholders to position vision health as a national priority, not only within clinical agendas, but as part of broader ageing, NCD, and development strategies.

Participants clearly underscored the need to strengthen prevention, early detection, and continuity of care. Several experts emphasised that this requires a more integrated approach, where screening and referral are embedded in primary care and supported by clearer pathways using shared data. Building frontline capacity, across both specialist and non-specialist providers was also identified as essential for expanding reach and continuity of care.

Innovation was widely recognised as a critical enabler of progress. Whether in the form of new therapies, AI-powered diagnostics, or digital platforms that support screening and care coordination – innovation's impact depends on alignment with system priorities and readiness. When embedded into delivery models and supported by policy and infrastructure, innovation has the potential to significantly improve outcomes while easing long-term demands on health systems.

Throughout the discussion, there was a strong sense of shared purpose and a recognition that progress is most sustainable when stakeholders work together. That's the kind of partnership we remain focused on – advancing science while helping to strengthen vision care for the long term.

Looking ahead, what is the most important change you believe the APAC region must prioritise collectively to transform vision health outcomes, and how can Roche help lead that charge?

Vision health is deeply connected to many of the region's long-term priorities: from healthy ageing and chronic disease management to workforce productivity and health system sustainability. As these pressures grow, there is a strong case for embedding vision more intentionally within national strategies and care models.

That includes investing in early detection, strengthening care coordination, and supporting approaches that prioritise continuity and quality. Embedding eye health within broader strategies for ageing populations and chronic disease management, while building capacity across the care pathway, can help deliver more consistent and timely outcomes.

Asia Pacific has both the urgency and the opportunity to lead in this space. With growing momentum around the value of health, the region can help shape how vision care is prioritised and delivered in the years ahead.

At Roche, we are committed to supporting that progress. Through innovation, long-term partnerships, and collaboration with stakeholders, we will continue working to advance vision health as a shared priority across the region.

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