

# Govt backflips on glaucoma funds

THE NSW Health Minister's office last month denied its earlier claims that the Government had allocated \$100,000 to a State-wide glaucoma prevention program.

The denial followed a plea to Health Minister Peter Collins for funds by glaucoma awareness campaigner Rolf Kaiser, who last month staged a one-day protest on the steps of Parliament House in Sydney.

An Albury newspaper, *The Border Mail*, reported in August 1988 that the Minister's office had claimed a glaucoma prevention program was being set up with State funds of \$10,000 a year for 10 years.

This claim was later researched by the newspaper and Mr Kaiser, himself a glaucoma victim, after the three hospitals claimed to have been receiving the funds could not

be identified by the Minister's office.

*The Border Mail* reported last month that a spokesperson for the minister, Wayne Geddes, had incorrectly identified the Lions Club Save Sight Foundation (run in association with the Sydney Eye Hospital) as beneficiary of the funds.

At that time Mr Geddes said he was "not 100% sure" about the \$100,000 figure or who had received the first year's funding.

## Investigated

Mr Geddes later told *Eyecare Australia* that "no one knew where the (\$100,000) figure had originated". Acknowledging that the figure was attributed to him in the *Border Mail* story, he said, "I know I was quoted. I was quoted when I shouldn't have been quoted and anything in that

item that comes from me is not me at all."

The *Border Mail* has stood by its story, affirming that Mr Geddes had nominated the \$100,000 figure.

Mr Geddes, meanwhile, told *Eyecare Australia* that Mr Kaiser was being investigated by lawyers for the Lions Save Sight Foundation and Sydney University (which controls the foundation) for not revealing the whereabouts of money given to him by the foundation.

A lawyer for Sydney University said that Mr Kaiser had not been given any money by the foundation and was "definitely not being investigated".

The controversy surrounding Mr Kaiser (see adjoining story), a 49-year-old invalid pensioner who claims to have spent his life savings and risked his house to conduct a

national glaucoma awareness program, traces back to correspondence he had with the Minister in October 1987 when Mr Collins was shadow Minister for Health.

Mr Kaiser, who had already contacted 50 corporations and institutions for funding for his glaucoma awareness campaign with no success, was commended by Mr Collins for his efforts in glaucoma education.

## Not available

Mr Kaiser said Mr Collins encouraged him to apply for funds from the then-Minister for Health, Peter Anderson, because there had been a large funding boost for health awareness programs.

When the Greiner Government came to power in March 1988 and Mr Collins became

Health Minister, Mr Kaiser made a request for \$15,000 to continue his campaign. Mr Collins replied in a letter dated 20 July 1988, "Whilst I am sympathetic to the type of campaign you are endeavouring to promote, I regret that

funds are not available to assist you."

The letter led him to stage his protest at the State Parliament in an effort to re-start dialogue with the Minister's office about glaucoma education. □

## ON THE COVER



If your patients plan to do a lot of driving during the Christmas holidays, like this fellow, recommend that they have a check-up. Thanks to Tom Willis and his partner Helen Scott for agreeing to test a particularly unusual patient.