

# YOUR CARE POLMED

March 2026

“To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity.”

Nelson Mandela

Dear POLMED Member,

March marks Human Rights Month in South Africa, culminating in Human Rights Day on 21 March. It’s a time to reflect on the progress we have made as a nation and to recognise the rights that protect our dignity, safety and wellbeing.

Among these is the right to access healthcare services.

Access to quality healthcare is not a privilege reserved for a few. It is fundamental to living a life of dignity. It allows families to thrive, communities to remain resilient, and individuals to pursue their goals without the added burden of preventable illness or financial hardship.

At POLMED, supporting your right to healthcare goes beyond settling claims. It involves enabling access to quality care through established provider networks, encouraging preventative screenings and wellness initiatives, shielding members from unforeseen medical expenses, and maintaining a sustainable healthcare model that protects the Scheme for current and future beneficiaries alike.

This month, we explore what the right to healthcare means in practice and how you can make the most of the benefits designed to protect you and your family.

**Because your health is not a luxury. It’s your right.**

Yours in health,  
The YourCare Team

In this issue...

## PROTECTING YOUR VISION: THE LINK BETWEEN DIABETES AND GLAUCOMA

March commemorates World Glaucoma Day, a campaign to raise awareness about a condition that affects 4.5% of the population and is the leading cause of blindness worldwide.

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## UPHOLDING THE RIGHT TO HEALTH THIS HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Human Rights Day is a reminder of the sacrifices made by individuals in the country’s journey towards freedom, equality and dignity for all.

[▶ READ MORE...](#)

## SUPERBUGS AND HEALTH: FIGHTING ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE

Today, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is becoming a leading global public health threat and is responsible for 8 500 and 35 000 deaths in South Africa.

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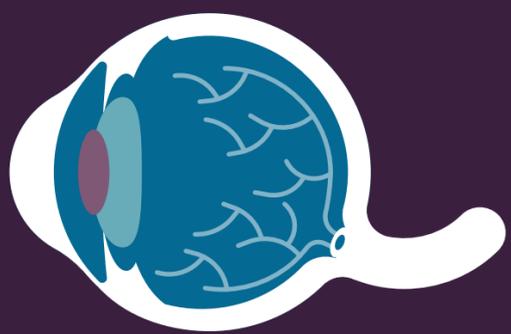
## Protecting Your Vision: The Link Between Diabetes And Glaucoma

One of the dangers of uncontrolled diabetes is that elevated blood sugar can cause damage to blood vessels, including in the eyes, which have some of the smallest blood vessels in the body.



This is why people living with diabetes,

**INCLUDING MORE THAN 2 MILLION SOUTH AFRICANS** have double the risk of developing glaucoma.



Glaucoma is a group of diseases caused by the pressure building up in the eye, which can permanently damage the optic nerve.

March commemorates **World Glaucoma Day**, a campaign to raise awareness about a condition that affects



**4.5% OF THE POPULATION**, and is the leading cause of blindness worldwide.



On POLMED more than 44 000 members are registered for Diabetes.

Several factors can increase one's risk for glaucoma:



Family history



Race



Poor blood circulation



Chronic conditions, such as hypertension and diabetes

### SCREENING

Often referred to as the "silent thief of sight", glaucoma rarely has any symptoms, so early detection is important. The best way to ensure this is with regular comprehensive eye exams.

While you should have a routine eye exam every 2 years, you may need an annual exam if you have more than one of the risk factors for glaucoma, including a chronic disease diagnosis such as diabetes.



If you're diagnosed with a chronic condition such as diabetes, the first step to protecting your vision is managing your condition appropriately, which includes taking your medication as prescribed, following a healthy diet, exercising regularly and managing stress.



### THE DIABETES-GLAUCOMA CONNECTION

The connection between diabetes and glaucoma is often overlooked, and can pose a significant risk to eye health.

World Glaucoma Day is a reminder to us all to take control of our health and vision by understanding our risks and getting screened.

For more information on Diabetes or enrollment on the Disease Risk Management programme you can email [polmeddiseaseman@medscheme.co.za](mailto:polmeddiseaseman@medscheme.co.za) or call **0860765633**

**Did you know that Glaucoma screening is part of the Preventative benefits on POLMED?**

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- <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/4212-glaucoma>
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## Upholding the right to health this Human Rights Day

Human Rights Day, observed in South Africa on **21 March** in commemoration of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, is a reminder of the sacrifices made by individuals in the country’s journey towards freedom, equality and dignity for all.



**But it’s also a day to reflect on the rights entrenched in the Bill of Rights, Chapter 2 of our Constitution, one of the most important of which is the right to accessible, quality healthcare.**

Health isn’t a privilege. Under the Bill of Rights, everyone has the right to access healthcare services, which are fundamental not only to ensuring a life lived with dignity and opportunity but also to building an inclusive and thriving society.



### REMOVING BARRIERS



Through consultations, preventive screenings, personalised care plans and access to essential medication, POLMED is working to remove barriers that stand between members and their wellbeing.



Because non-communicable diseases are responsible for 51% of all deaths, and 24% of premature deaths in South Africa, chronic disease management is imperative. Not only do these diseases strain the healthcare system, but prevention and management strengthen communities and ensure a healthier society.



The theme for Human Rights Day this year is “Deepening a Culture of Social Justice and Human Rights”. As we celebrate the progress we’ve made as a nation in the last 65 years, let’s recommit to protecting the rights of every individual, including the right to health. By doing so, we can continue to build a healthier and more equitable South Africa.

#### REFERENCES:

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- <https://www.gov.za/HumanRightsMonth2025>
- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/16070658.2024.2393054>

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## Superbugs and health: Fighting Antimicrobial Resistance

**Antimicrobials** – medications such as antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals and antiparasitics – are essential for fighting infections.

But over time, the organisms that cause infections can evolve and naturally become resistant to the medication we use.



Today, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is becoming a leading global public health threat.



AMR is directly responsible for

**1.27 million** deaths worldwide, and between **8 500** and **35 000** deaths in South Africa.



### WHAT CAUSES AMR?

#### Overuse of antibiotics:

A 2022 South African study found that, of **188 141** prescriptions for antibiotics, only **8.8%** were appropriate,

**32.0%** were potentially appropriate,

**45.4%** were inappropriate and

**13.8%** couldn't be assessed.



**Antibiotics are effective only for bacterial infections.**

This excludes colds and flu, which are caused by viral infections.

#### Misuse of antibiotics:

Not taking medication as prescribed, or taking someone else's medication, can cause bacteria to multiply and mutate.

#### Spontaneous resistance:

A bacterium can randomly mutate.

#### Transmitted resistance:

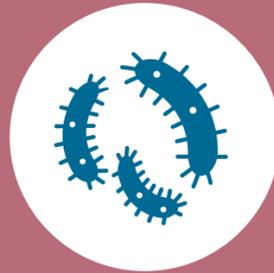
Some drug-resistant bacterial infections can be passed to others, making them hard to treat. These include HIV, influenza, and hepatitis B and C.



### DANGERS OF AMR

When microbes become resistant to medication, they become “superbugs”, and increase the risk for:

- Infections, including those previously manageable
- Prolonged sickness
- Increased mortality
- Increased spread of disease
- Increased hospital stay
- Increased healthcare costs
- Disease outbreaks in animals
- Economic burden



### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Antimicrobials are essential to health, but we can each do our part to fight AMR.



Always take antibiotics as prescribed by a qualified healthcare practitioner – complete the full course of treatment.



Never take someone else's antibiotics.



Never take antibiotics to treat viral illnesses such as colds or flu.



Practise good hygiene, such as regular handwashing, to reduce the spread of bacteria.



Stay up to date with vaccinations.

Healthcare practitioners should also ensure that they prescribe antibiotics appropriately.

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