

# VISION REHABILITATION INTERNATIONAL

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## Editorial - Looking Back to Move Forward

Ewa Borkowski<sup>1\*</sup> (on behalf of the editorial board)

<sup>1</sup> Guide Dogs New South Wales

\*Email: [eborkowski@guidedogs.com.au](mailto:eborkowski@guidedogs.com.au)

### Honouring Our Origins

As we reflect on the journey of this journal, we return to its beginnings in 2008, when it was launched as the International Journal of Orientation & Mobility (IJOM). At that time, the vision was to create a dedicated platform for sharing research, innovative practices, and professional dialogue within the Orientation and Mobility (O&M) field. This initiative was made possible through the leadership and support of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and the RIDBC Renwick Centre, University of Newcastle, alongside a distinguished editorial advisory panel of global experts (Gallimore & Steer, 2008).

The inaugural editorial by Dr. Desirée Gallimore and Dr. Mike Steer set the tone for a publication committed to advancing professional practice and client outcomes. Their foresight recognised the need for a scholarly forum that would not only inform but inspire, ensuring that O&M professionals could keep pace with evolving client expectations in a progressive world.

We would also like to acknowledge the significant scholarly contributions of Dr. Steven (Steve) La Grow (member of original editorial board), whose foundational research and advisory presence helped shape the journal's early direction and championed it in New Zealand. Dr. Steve La Grow is well-known for his academic work in the field of O&M and vision rehabilitation.

Over the years the journal expanded its content to include research, practice reports, and global perspectives on O&M. In 2019, the official name

changed to Journal of Vision Rehabilitation International and Dr. Lisa Nivison-Smith of University of New South Wales (UNSW), a new editor-in-chief, guided the journal through its pivotal rebranding to reflect a broader vision rehabilitation focus and attract multidisciplinary authorship. The journal continued to be sponsored by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT who employs the largest group of O&M Specialists in Australia.

### Why the Change?

The transition from IJOM to Journal of Vision Rehabilitation International was more than a rebranding exercise—it was a response to the evolving needs of the field. Vision rehabilitation today is inherently transdisciplinary, involving medical professionals such as ophthalmologists as well as allied health practitioners (for example, orthoptists, occupational therapists, and educators), O&M Specialists, assistive technology specialists, and, most importantly, clients and their families. By broadening the scope, the journal editorial committee aimed to present a variety of perspectives, innovative practices, and collaborative models that reflect the complexity and richness of vision rehabilitation.

The journal now serves as a global platform for sharing progress across disciplines, including O&M, ensuring that professionals remain informed and equipped to meet the advances and expectations of clients in a rapidly changing world. Amid all this change, one principle remains constant: the client is at the heart of everything we do. Their lived experiences, aspirations, and voices must shape

our research, our practice, and our policies. High-quality, individualised service is the foundation of professional standards, and this journal will continue to champion approaches that prioritize dignity, autonomy, and inclusion.

In reflecting on the journal's rich history, we gratefully acknowledge both academics and practitioners who contributed and shaped the evolution of Vision Rehabilitation International and its predecessor, International Journal of Orientation and Mobility (IJOM). For example, Dr. Lil Deverell's research on mobility frameworks and outcome measures has been instrumental in advancing practice. Dr. Bronwen Scott contributed key insights into early intervention and O&M education in Australia. Dr. Laura Bozeman's work in personnel preparation and inclusive mobility education helped bridge international practices. Dr. Nora Griffin-Shirley has been a global leader in transition services and professional development. Dr. Dona Sauerburger's pioneering work in street-crossing safety and risk assessment remains a cornerstone of O&M practice. Dr. Sandra Rosen, through her scholarship on mobility for individuals with multiple disabilities, has enriched the field's understanding of inclusive instruction.

### Shaping the Future

The future of vision rehabilitation is being transformed by technology. Innovative Virtual Reality (VR) applications are now used for orientation training, environmental simulations, and skill development in safe, controlled settings. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and smart AI-driven tools are enabling personalised rehabilitation plans and predictive analytics for client outcomes. Smart phone applications such as 'Be My Eyes' or 'Seeing AI' provide real-time navigation assistance. These advancements offer unprecedented opportunities—but they also demand ethical frameworks, equitable access, and ongoing professional development to ensure technology serves as an enabler, not a barrier.

### O&M Profession Recognition in Australia

This year, 2025, is a significant milestone for the O&M profession in Australia. A significant achievement for the O&M profession has been its recognition by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) as a provider of therapeutic services for people who are blind or have low vision. This acknowledgment underscores the critical role of O&M specialists in promoting independence and participation, and it reflects the

growing appreciation of vision rehabilitation as an essential component of disability support.

To reinforce the journal's commitment to professional autonomy and collaboration within the vision rehabilitation field, the Orientation and Mobility Association of Australasia (OMAA) as an independent professional body plans to take full ownership of the journal in 2027.

### Challenges and Opportunities Ahead

As we look toward and plan the transfer of journal ownership to OMAA, we recognise both the opportunities and responsibilities this brings. We need to ensure that employing organisations and universities training the new generation of professionals in this field continue their support for the journal, as they carry a shared responsibility to support research, uphold standards, and advocate for equitable access to services.

Currently, there is no other journal in Australasia that comprehensively addresses the rehabilitation aspects of blindness and low vision from a multidisciplinary perspective that includes academics, practitioners, and voices of lived experience. This unique position places an obligation on us to lead with integrity, inclusivity, and innovation.

'Looking Back to Move Forward' is more than a theme, it is a commitment. We honour the visionaries who started it all in 2008, and we're stepping into the future with confidence and excitement. The journal will continue to provide a platform for current research, emerging technologies, and collaborative practices, ensuring that professionals across disciplines have access to knowledge that empowers them to deliver the highest standards of care.

As vision rehabilitation professionals, your expertise is invaluable. We invite you to share your insights, innovations, and experiences with us so we can publish work that strengthens and evolves practices, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

As we move forward, let us stay true to what drives us: keeping the client at the centre, championing collaboration, mentoring new professionals in the field, and advancing vision rehabilitation as a field that transforms lives. Together, we can shape a future where independence, inclusion, and innovation are not aspirations—they are realities.

## Editorial Acknowledgement

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Editors-in-Chief who have guided Vision Rehabilitation International through its evolution. Dr. Desirée Gallimore laid a strong foundation during her tenure with the International Journal of Orientation and Mobility (IJOM), fostering rigorous scholarship. Dr. Lisa Nivison-Smith (UNSW) led the journal's pivotal rebranding in 2019, expanding its scope and reach. Since 2023, Dr. Nicola McDowell (Massey University, New Zealand), representing the Orientation & Mobility Association of Australasia (OMAA), continues this legacy with a renewed focus on global collaboration and innovation.

- Dr. McDowell is supported by a diverse Editorial Board:
- Dr. Susan Silveira – NextSense & Macquarie University, Australia
- Dr. Sharon Oberstein – School of Optometry and Vision Science, UNSW
- Mr. Matthew Walker – School of Optometry and Vision Science, UNSW
- Ewa Borkowski – Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (ROMSA), Client Services Practice Governance, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT

We also acknowledge our Editorial Advisory Panel for their longstanding guidance and encouragement:

- Dr. Nora Griffin-Shirley – Texas Tech University, USA
- Dona Sauerburger – Orientation and Mobility Services, USA
- Dr. Bruce Blasch – Bear Consultants Inc, USA
- Dr. Laura Bozeman – UMass Boston, USA
- Dr. Desiree Gallimore – Travel-Training Solutions, Australia

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