

Testing can predict future of eye disease glaucoma

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FAMILY INHERITANCE: Glaucoma sufferer Sebastian Cielens with fiancée Louise Austin.

Picture: NIGEL PARSONS *Source:* AdelaideNow

SEBASTIAN Cielens can see the future for 10-year-old son Che - and it is bright. Genetic testing has cleared Che of a gene mutation for the disease that will eventually take what remains of his father's vision.

Glaucoma runs like a giant spike through the family tree, striking Mr Cielens, 35, his father, grandfather and great-grandfather.

The Pembroke history teacher has an abnormality of the myocilin gene, which causes an aggressive form of the disease. He is blind in one eye and has only a 20-degree field of vision in the other.

Mr Cielens is one of more than 1300 people on the Australian and New Zealand Registry of Advanced Glaucoma, started by a team at Flinders University and Flinders Medical Centre in 2007.

Associate Professor Jamie Craig, who leads the team, is in the middle of a five-year project aimed at predicting those most likely to develop advanced glaucoma.

Studying the DNA of those in the registry has led to identifying those with known genetic mutations. Family members are then also offered testing and those with the genetic fault can be monitored, diagnosed and treated before vision loss occurs.

Commonly associated with high pressure in the eye, glaucoma destroys the optic nerve.

Dr Craig said many people did not notice when they began to lose peripheral vision.

"By the time they do notice it, so much vision has gone and at that stage it becomes hard to protect what vision they have left," he said.

It was three months ago that Dr Craig gave Mr Cielens the news his son did not carry the same genetic abnormality.

The odds had been 50:50 and Mr Cielens and his partner, Louise Austin, were elated.

"A smile went from ear to ear and straight away I called my dad and told him," Mr Cielens said.

The Eye Foundation runs its "julEYE" campaign each year to encourage Australians to have their eyes tested.

It says that every 65 minutes, an Australian loses all or part of their vision but 75 per cent of vision loss is preventable or treatable