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Through Our Eyes: The History of Orthoptics in Australia, 1960-1991

This paper explores the transformation of orthoptics in Australia between 1960 and 1991—a time of significant educational, professional, and cultural change. It focuses on key developments across these three decades, including the change from ophthalmologist-led, hospital-based training to university-accredited orthoptic education. This transition helped establish higher clinical standards and broader recognition for the field.

Key to this history is the broadening of the orthoptist's role beyond the traditional focus on ocular motility disorders. During this period, practice expanded to include ophthalmic technology, research, low vision rehabilitation, and sub-specialist care, reflecting the profession's ability to adapt to the evolving needs of the healthcare system. The growing professionalisation of the Orthoptic Association of Australia (OAA) was also central, as it worked to advocate for the profession and support its members amid these changes.

Drawing on oral histories and interviews, this paper highlights the personal experiences of orthoptists who were instrumental in shaping the profession during this period. It examines key milestones such as educational reforms in Sydney and Melbourne, and the integration of men into a traditionally female-dominated field. These first-hand accounts offer valuable insights into the challenges, motivations, and achievements that defined this era of transformation.

In conclusion, the paper argues that the adaptability and resilience shown by orthoptists throughout these years not only strengthened their professional identity but also widened their scope of practice and in doing so cemented their role in Australia's expanding healthcare landscape.