

Laos

Invest in Sight. Transform a Nation.

A rare opportunity to end
a global problem.



The **Fred Hollows**
Foundation



More than 1 billion people live with vision loss that could have been prevented or is treatable. Without urgent action, that number will rise to 1.7 billion by 2050.

For more than 30 years, The Fred Hollows Foundation has worked to end avoidable blindness across more than 25 countries, transforming lives, economies, and communities.

We've proven that change at scale is possible.

In Vietnam, we helped build a national eye health system that now reaches nine out of ten people needing cataract surgery — and has eliminated trachoma as a public health problem.

Our next frontier: scaling impact

The Foundation's next phase focuses on priority countries across Asia and Africa where the need is greatest and the opportunity for lasting system change is possible.

A proven model for scale

In 1992, when The Foundation first started working in Vietnam, there were only two ophthalmologists who could perform modern cataract surgery.

Only 50 cataract surgeries were performed each year, despite around 1 million people needing it.

Today, Vietnam's 97 million people have near universal access to eye health and each year around 350,000 cataract surgeries are performed by more than 1,000 surgeons.

Our model in Vietnam proves that partnership, leadership, and investment can transform entire health systems.



1992-2000

Laying the foundations

- Fred Hollows begins training local ophthalmologists (“teach the teachers first”).
- Hundreds of surgeons were trained in modern cataract surgery.
- Early system building with intraocular lenses (IOLs) and essential tools.



2000-2015

Expanding reach

- National outreach programs and clinics were established.
- Community health workers were trained to bring services closer to people.
- Major gains: 70% cataract surgery coverage and greater than 80% access to glasses.



2015-2025

Integration and sustainability

- Eye health became embedded in national education and health systems.
- Sustainable funding via national insurance schemes.
- 350,000+ cataract surgeries are now performed annually.
- 60% of infrastructure is funded by Vietnamese partners.
- Transition to full government leadership underway.
- Close to universal health coverage.
- Trachoma has been eliminated.

Vietnam led the way — Laos is next

The opportunity: accelerate impact in Laos

With a population of around seven million people and large rural communities, Laos faces a growing burden of avoidable blindness. Without significant investment now, **more than 1.2 million people could be living with vision loss by 2050**. Cataract is the leading cause, and millions still lack access to even the most basic eye care.



Cataract is the leading cause of blindness in Laos and globally, responsible for almost 75% of cases.

Entirely curable with a short, low-cost surgery. Yet, without intervention, more than **66,000~ people will need cataract surgery by 2030**.

1.2 million

People could live with vision loss in Laos by 2050

Refractive error is the leading cause of vision impairment globally and affects an estimated 671 million people.

Easily fixed with glasses, **but millions in rural areas cannot access even a simple eye test**.

66,000 people

will need cataract surgery in Laos by 2030

Women are disproportionately impacted, making up more than 60% of people who are blind in Laos.

Ensuring equitable access for women and girls, particularly within ethnic minority communities, is critical to closing the cataract backlog.

US \$66 million

is lost every year in productivity in Laos due to poor vision

A friendship that changed the world



When Dr Sanduk Ruit was a boy growing up in the remote mountains of Nepal, he lost three of his siblings by the time he was nineteen. That heartbreak set him on a lifelong mission: to ensure no one lost a loved one for want of preventable care.

Years later, he met Professor Fred Hollows, an Australian ophthalmologist with an unshakable belief that everyone, no matter where they live, deserves quality healthcare. Fred saw the injustice of people going blind simply because they were poor. Sanduk saw it too. Both refused to accept this as inevitable.

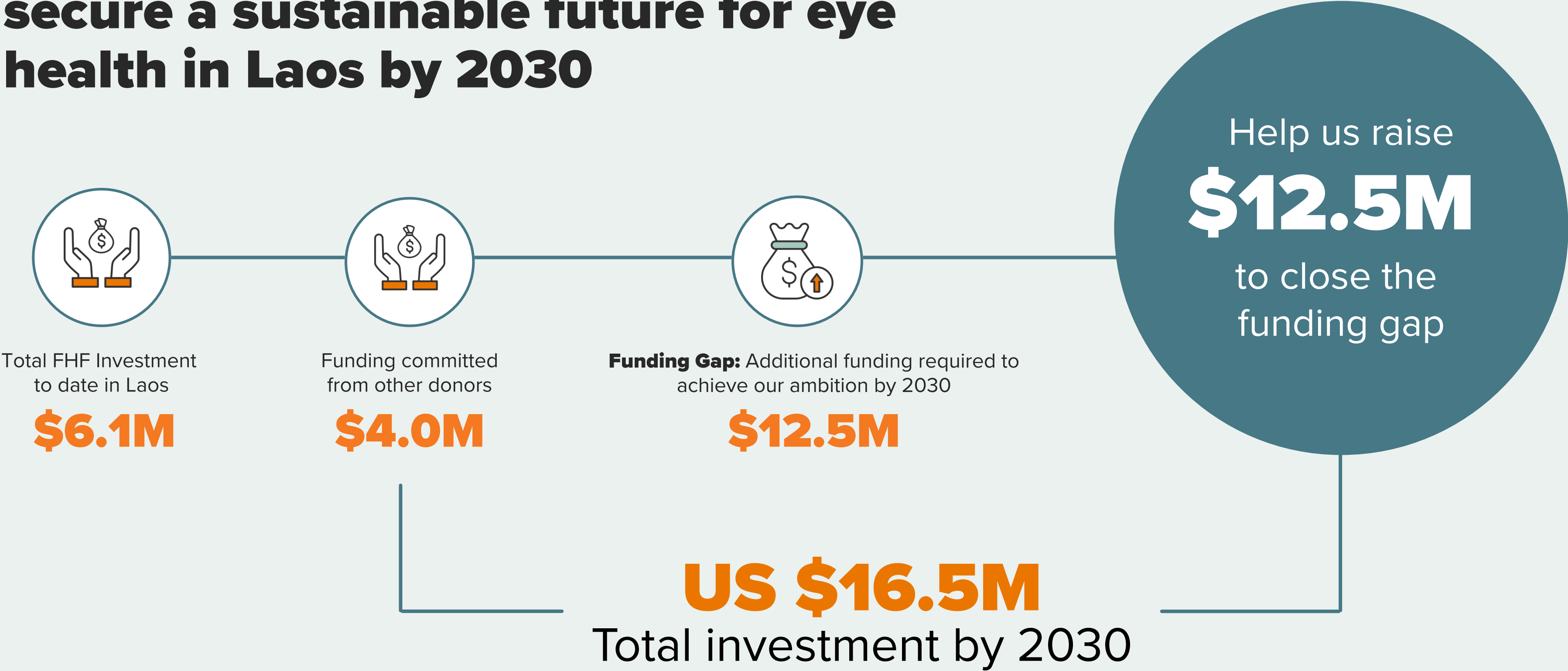
Together, they disrupted the global medical establishment. Their partnership broke through barriers of class, geography, and convention to deliver world-class cataract surgery to people living in poverty. When they were told it couldn't be done, they built factories to produce high-quality intraocular lenses locally — reducing costs from \$200 to \$5 and restoring sight to millions.

Dr Ruit went on to found the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology and the Cure Blindness Project, and his partnership with The Fred Hollows Foundation remains strong today.

Both men were visionaries who forged a path that once seemed impossible. Their determination now drives our work in Laos, tackling cataract blindness and bringing sight within everyone's reach.

“ People thought we were mad
— but we proved them wrong.”
— **Dr Sanduk Ruit**

We can clear the cataract backlog and secure a sustainable future for eye health in Laos by 2030



We have a unique opportunity for generational transformation in Laos.

Urgent need for backlog reduction and a strengthened eye health workforce.

Without immediate intervention, the cataract backlog will continue to grow. The backlog is driven by limited access to specialised eye care, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and a severe shortage of trained ophthalmologists.

A small country we can scale quickly, backed by the Ministry of Health.

By addressing the cataract backlog across all provinces, we can enable Laos to reach a steady state by 2030. This will be transformational for the country and is supported by the Ministry of Health.



Now is the time to act.

The first sector-wide approach with The Cure Blindness Project and the Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology (TIO).

Dr Ruit was one of Fred's closest collaborators and has remained a key partner to The Fred Hollows Foundation. We have worked closely together for decades in Nepal.

Dr Ruit and the TIO will partner with us to provide surge personnel to run outreach camps and train the workforce in Laos. This extends a long-standing partnership and demonstrates the potential for country-to-country collaboration and sector-wide impact.

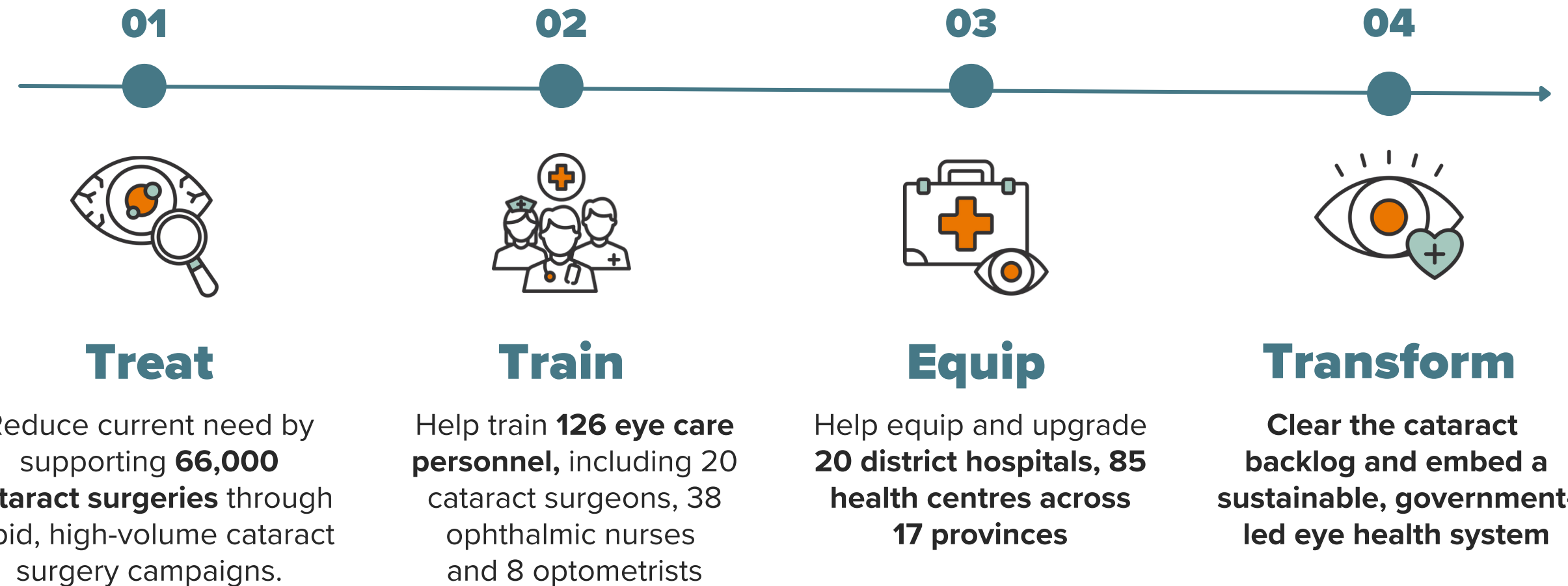
Building on momentum and our existing footprint.

- **The Foundation has already started in seven provinces**, and with this plan we will scale across all 17 provinces.
- **Deep, existing partnerships with the TIO**, which will supply surge personnel for backlog clearance and training.
- **Existing programs with partners in Laos**, with more than 111,000 surgeries completed, hundreds of thousands of people screened, and more than 35 surgeons trained.

How do we get there?

We have a bold vision.

By 2031, we want to clear the cataract backlog and reach a sustainable steady state in Laos.



How we will scale and sustain this impact

This initiative adopts a dual-track transformative approach: combining **rapid, high-volume cataract surgical delivery** to address the immediate backlog with eye health system-strengthening interventions that ensure sustainability and national ownership.

It shifts cataract service delivery from a project-based, externally driven model toward **a government-led, system-integrated program embedded within national health structures and systems.**



Our role in eye health

Brokering and convening

Building on our existing partners and expanding to work with other sectors, including education, transport and private sector.

Research and innovation

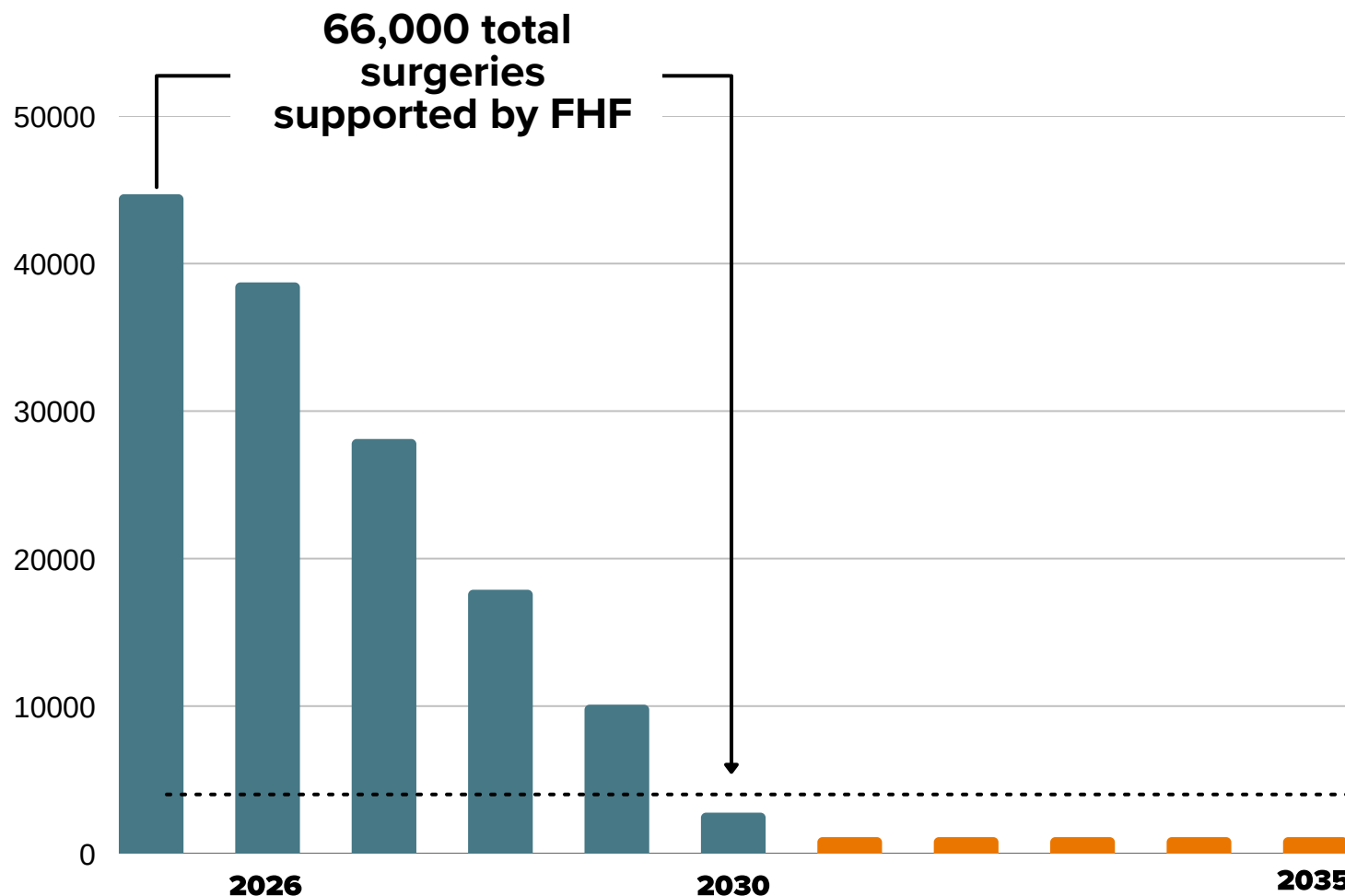
Utilising our world-class research to build the evidence needed for advocacy and policy changes, including research like our investment case.

Technical expertise

Leveraging our local and global expertise in health economics, clinical quality, health system improvement. We advise on policy and implementation at the county and national levels.

Scaling impact requires rapid, high-volume cataract surgery across all 17 provinces in Laos.

If we focused only on clearing the backlog, cataract services would not be sustainable, and the backlog would eventually return.



Cataract backlog in Laos

The program period covers Foundation-supported surgeries from 2026–2030. System-strengthening efforts aim to increase and maintain a Cataract Surgical Rate (CSR) of 1200, sufficient to manage new cataract cases (incidence).

Reducing the cataract backlog

Reduce the backlog of people waiting for cataract surgery to a sustainable ‘steady state’.

Steady State Supply = Incidence

Improve the eye health system

Build the eye health system, including leadership and governance, workforce, and financing mechanisms, to sustainably manage new cases (incidence).

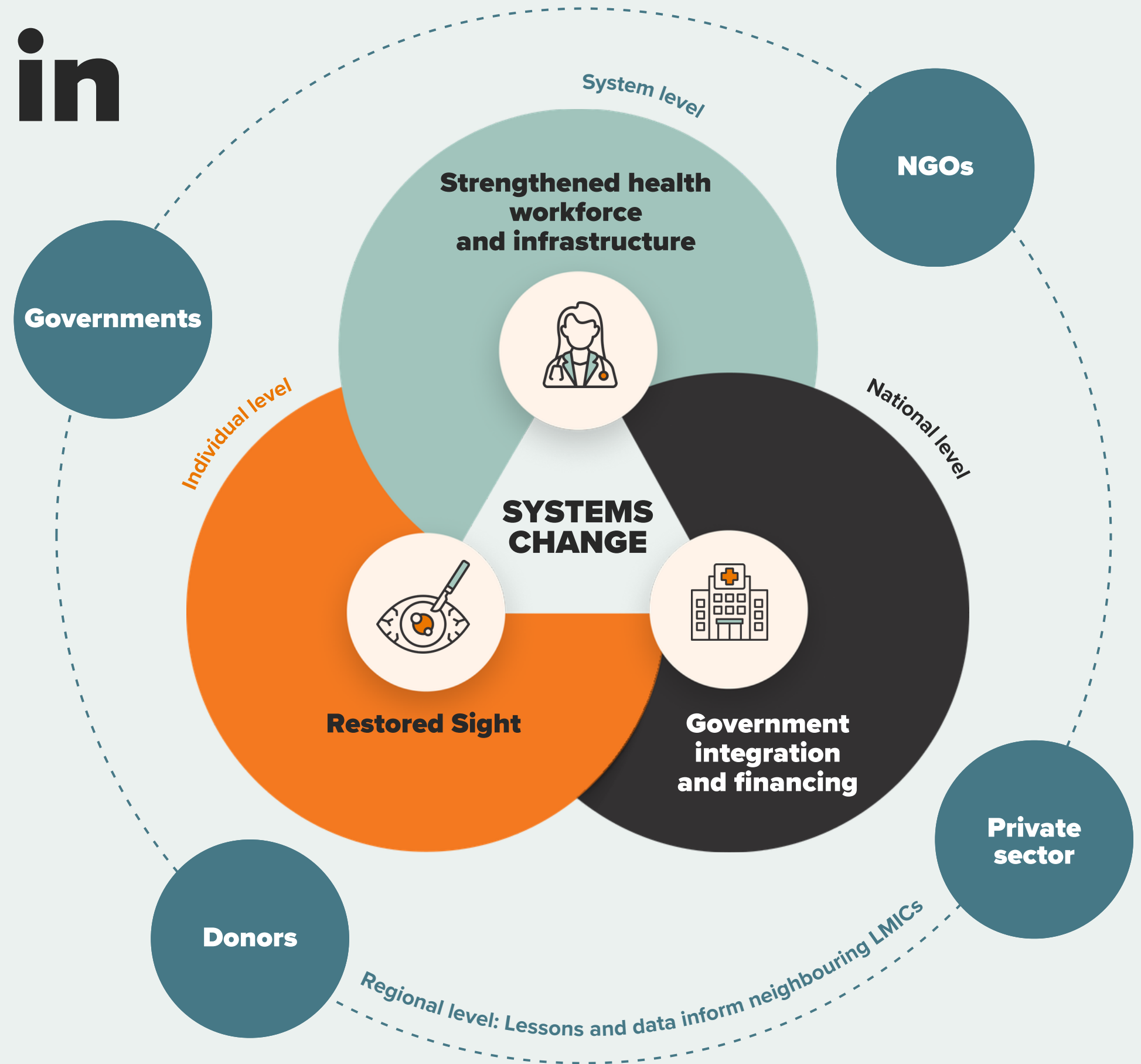
Why we invest in more than just surgeries

Ending avoidable blindness requires fixing the system that makes blindness so prevalent in the first place, not just delivering surgeries.

For a cataract operation to happen, three things must align: **the right team, in the right place, with the right equipment.**

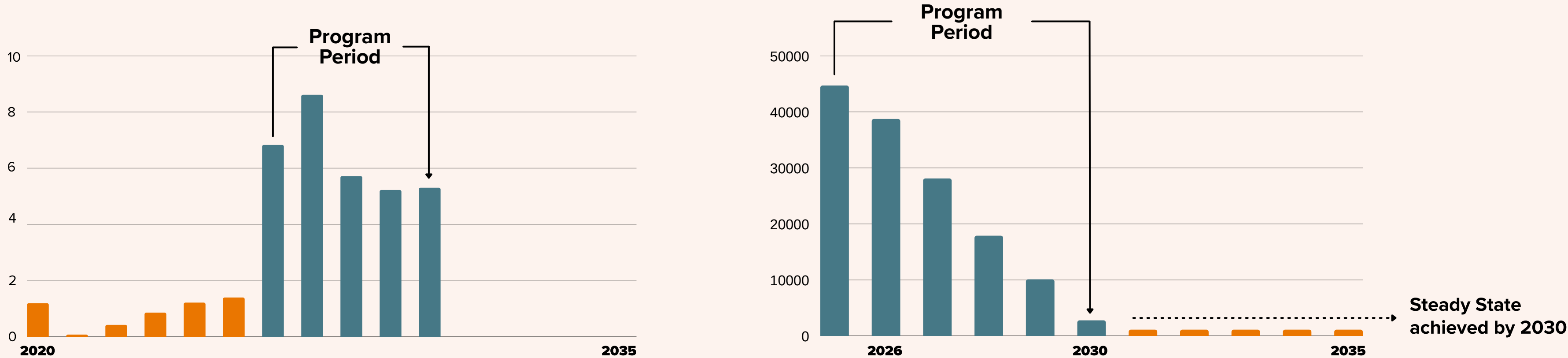
When even one link in this chain is broken, people go without care.

By investing in systems change and taking a sector-wide approach, we're not just restoring sight for individuals today, we're building a sustainable, self-reliant eye care system that will serve millions for generations to come.



Clear the cataract backlog and build a sustainable eye health system

What our comprehensive plan requires – \$16.5 million investment required by 2030



What you will be funding

\$9.4m 66,000 cataract surgeries delivered through rapid, high-volume outreach, and provision of spectacles for post-op patients to reduce backlog by 80%.

\$1.27m Development of National Eye Health Plan, integration of Clinical Quality and generation of evidence including RAAB

\$3.14m Equip and support 20 district hospitals, and 85 health centres, with essential equipment, consumables, and tools to deliver quality eye health services

\$1.6m National eye health workforce plan developed and implemented, including training for 126 eye health workers at district and provincial hospitals.

\$1.11m A government-led eye health financing model is strengthened to help cover eye health services, making access to quality eye care more equitable, affordable and sustainable.

Your impact

Your investment will generate substantial economic and social returns, grounded in analysis by The Foundation and its partners and reinforced by leading academic research.

Globally, every \$1 invested in eye health returns \$28 in benefits.



Fewer road crashes

Reduce road traffic injuries and deaths by reducing crash risk by up to 50%



Improved mental health

Reduce depression among people with vision impairment and their caregivers



Increased longevity

Reduced risk of mortality and comorbidities, particularly among people aged 65–74



Improved learning

Close the learning gap by up to 50% for children experiencing vision impairment



Reduced caregiving burden

Free up caregiver time for employment and other productive activities

Your investment
will unlock
US \$420M
In economic
returns in Laos



Improved productivity

Boost productivity or income by up to 10% for people with mild and near vision impairment



Increased employment

Increase employment for people with MSVI or blindness, who are 30% less likely to secure employment than those with unimpaired vision

Real people. Real impact.



At just 38, cataract blindness took away Lien's independence, her confidence, and her ability to provide for her children. She felt angry and depressed as she struggled to recognise faces or complete everyday tasks.

Being unable to afford medical help, let alone the transport costs to reach eye health services, the responsibility of the household fell to Lien's 14-year-old daughter, Aomphai.

Unlike other girls her age who continue to get an education and enjoy the last years of childhood, Aomphai dropped out of school and is working 13-hour days, four days a week at a banana plantation. When she finishes work, the cooking and caretaking of her mother and brother fall to her.

Through The Fred Hollows Foundation's outreach program, Lien was able to undergo surgery to restore her sight. When her bandages were removed, she cried seeing her child's face clearly for the first time. Lien immediately called her daughter to tell her she could now return to school.

“I can help my husband earn more money and I will be able to take my daughter to school. It's like a new life for me.”

— Lien

For women — mothers and daughters like Lien and Aomphai — the barriers created by vision loss can be catastrophic. Already at a disadvantage to access education and employment, many women and girls carry the brunt of domestic and caring duties, perpetuating a cycle of poverty.