

Rwanda

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 and restore sight; transforming lives, economies, and communities.

We've proven that change at scale is possible.

In Vietnam, it took three decades of partnership to build a national eye health system that now meets 90% of cataract needs and has eliminated trachoma.

Our next frontier: scaling impact.

To meet this moment, The Foundation is focusing its next phase of growth on nine countries across three regions where the need is greatest, the environment is enabling, and the potential for system-wide transformation is real.

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

Vietnam led the way — Rwanda is next

Rwanda: a unique opportunity

Rwanda is a politically stable, rapidly developing country. Its regional leadership in digital health, health financing reform and workforce training provides a strong foundation to scale impact and create a model for East Africa.



Cataract is the leading cause of blindness globally and in Rwanda, responsible for almost 56% of cases in Rwanda.

Cataract is entirely curable. Clearing the backlog by 2030 would mean more than **100,000 people receive cataract surgery.**

1.7 million people

could be living with vision loss by 2050 in Rwanda

Refractive error is the world's leading cause of vision impairment and affects an estimated 671 million people worldwide.

A common problem, yet many people **cannot afford or access** a simple eye test and glasses, especially in rural areas.

100,000 people

will need cataract surgery in Rwanda by 2030

Rise of retinopathy of prematurity (ROP), diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma are rising and contributing to avoidable blindness in Rwanda.

Ensuring services are available across the health system is **key to sustaining a strong eye health system.**

US \$19 million

lost every year in productivity in Rwanda due to poor vision

Without significant intervention, more than 1.7 million people in Rwanda could be living with vision loss by 2050.

Workforce and infrastructure shortages

While we need to increase the number of ophthalmologists, it is also critical that they are deployed to rural district areas. Existing workforce capacity also needs to be engaged to support backlog reduction through outreach.

Geographic access

Five of the seven hospitals offering cataract surgery on a continuous basis were in or near Kigali in 2022. There is a high unmet need for specialised eye care in the Western, Eastern, and Northern provinces.

Patient engagement

31% of people with cataract do not know their condition is treatable. While surgical outreach programs have improved geographical access, they continue to experience high patient drop-out rates.

Now is the time to act.

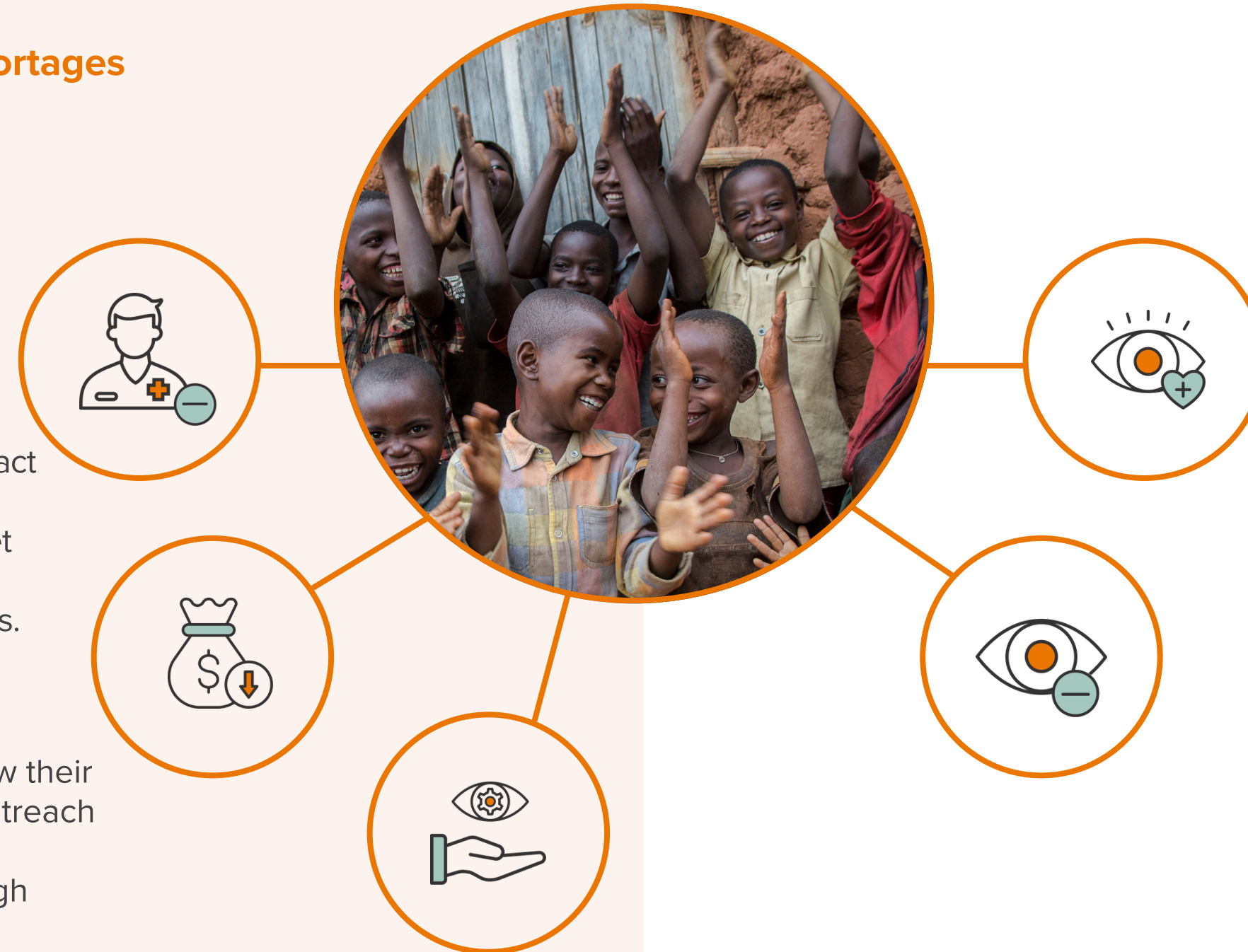
By leveraging existing outreach methods and establishing government-backed secondary eye units in public hospitals, we can reduce the backlog while strengthening the system to sustainably manage new cataract cases.

Building on existing momentum

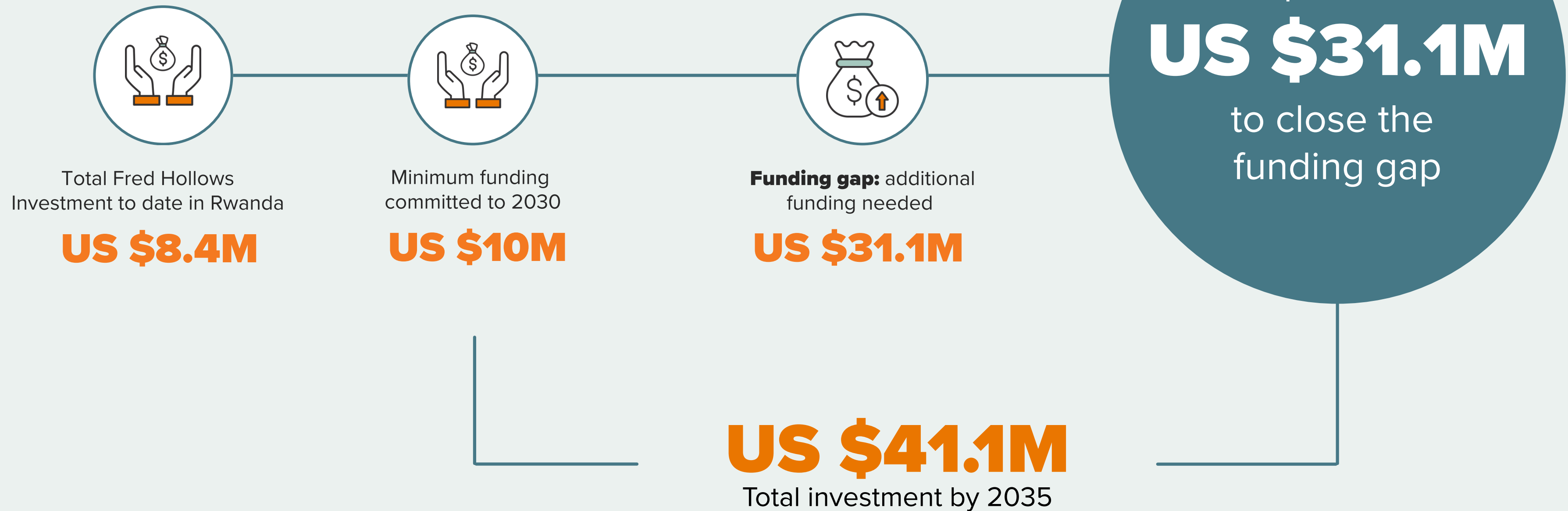
- Foundation to build upon: Rwanda has doubled its cataract surgical rate over the past six years. The Community-Based Health Insurance (CBHI) covers 90% of the population and currently partly reimburses cataract surgery.
- Existing programs with partners in Rwanda have completed more than 57,000 surgeries, and trained more than six ophthalmologists in the last 10 years.

Funding gaps left by USAID

- Funding shortfalls following USAID cuts mean that we risk losing gains already made.



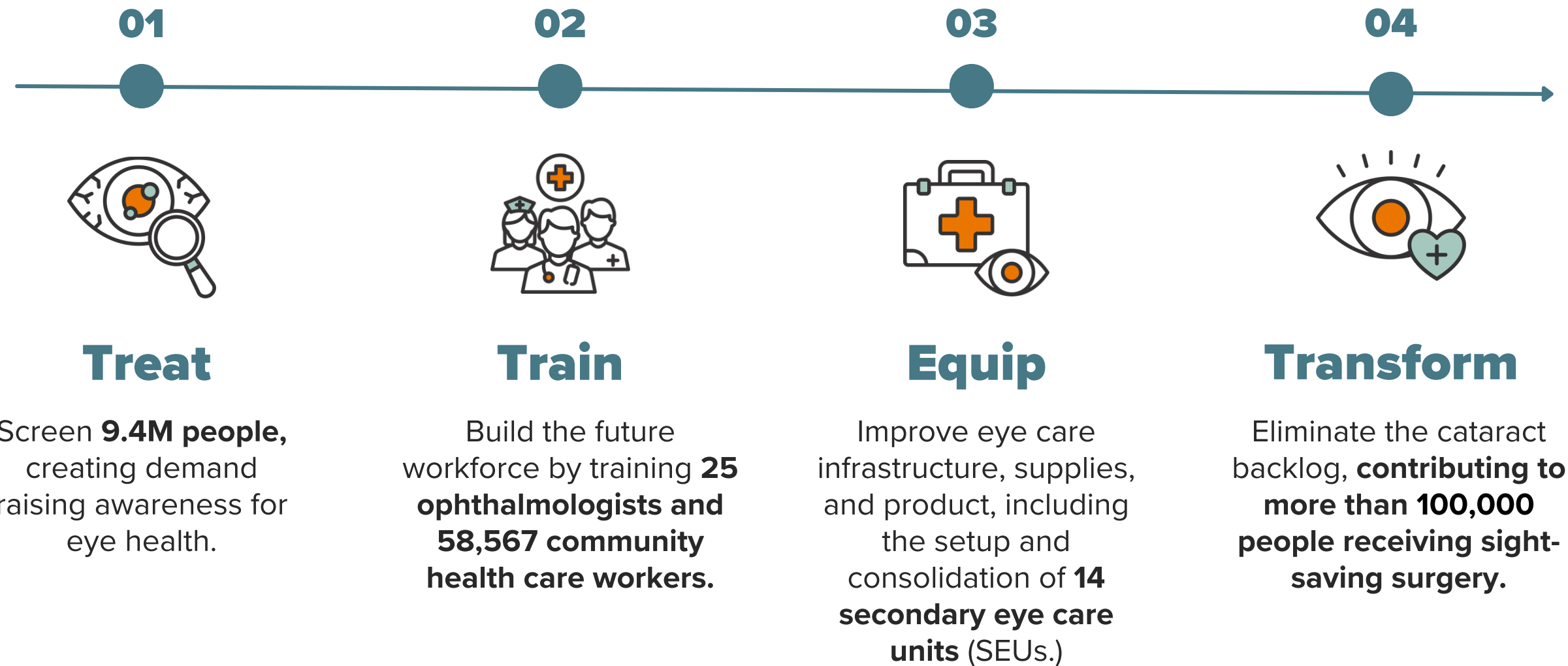
Investment needed to eliminate the cataract backlog and set up a sustainable eye health system by 2035



How do we get there?

We have a bold vision.

By 2035, we want to clear the cataract backlog and build a system where every person has equitable access to high-quality, affordable, and integrated eye care services



How we will scale and sustain this impact

Proven, cost-effective solutions delivered through coordinated outreach, hospital upgrades and workforce training.

Government ownership driving integration into schools and primary care.

Smarter delivery systems reducing costs and boosting efficiency through innovation and better use of resources.



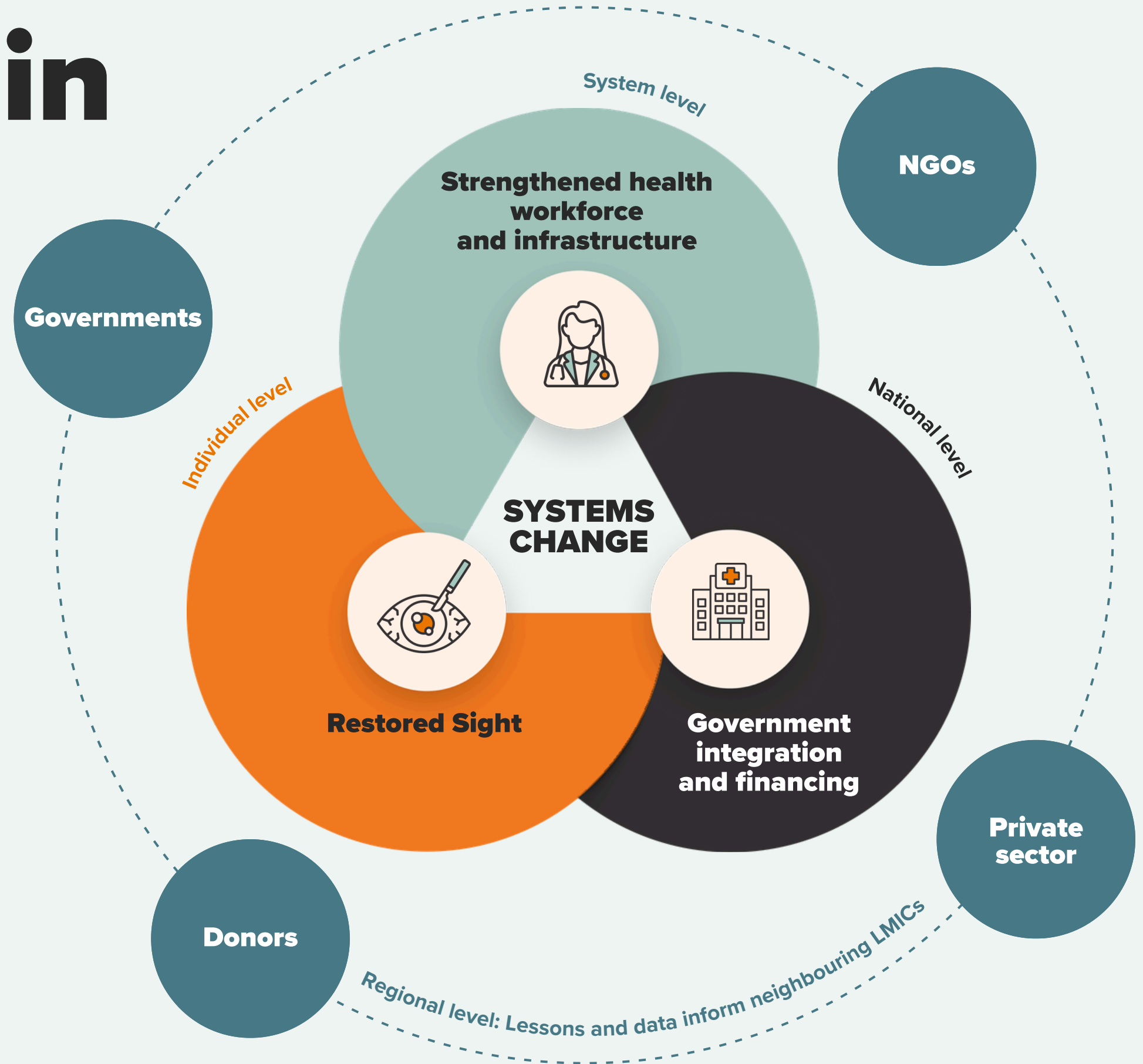
Why we invest in more than just surgeries

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.

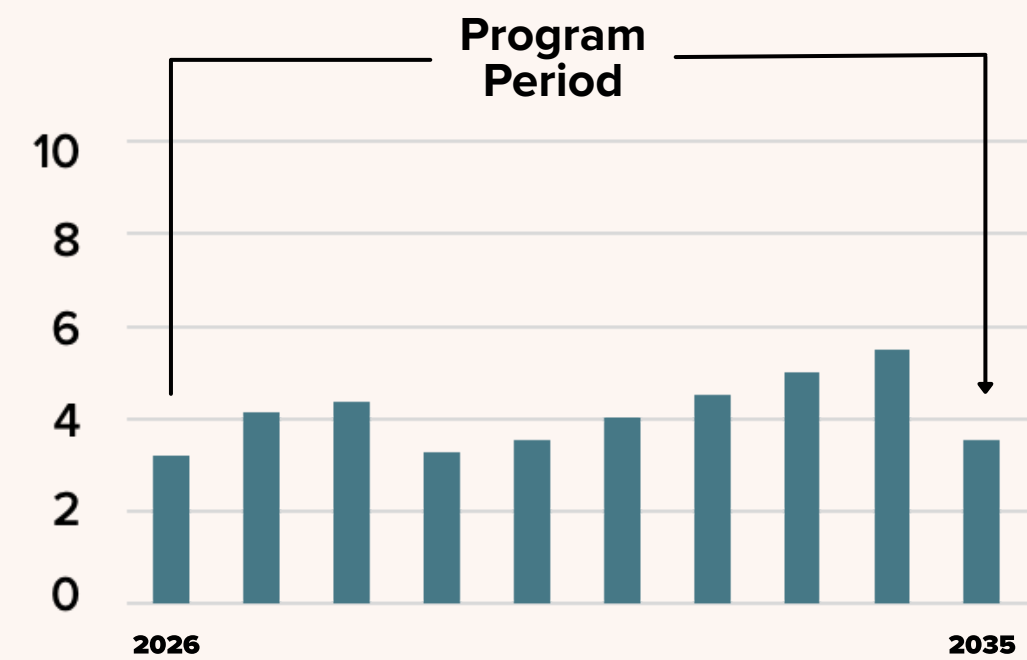
By investing in systems change and taking a sector-wide approach, we're not just restoring sight for individuals today, we're building a sustainable, self-reliant eye care system that will serve millions for generations to come.



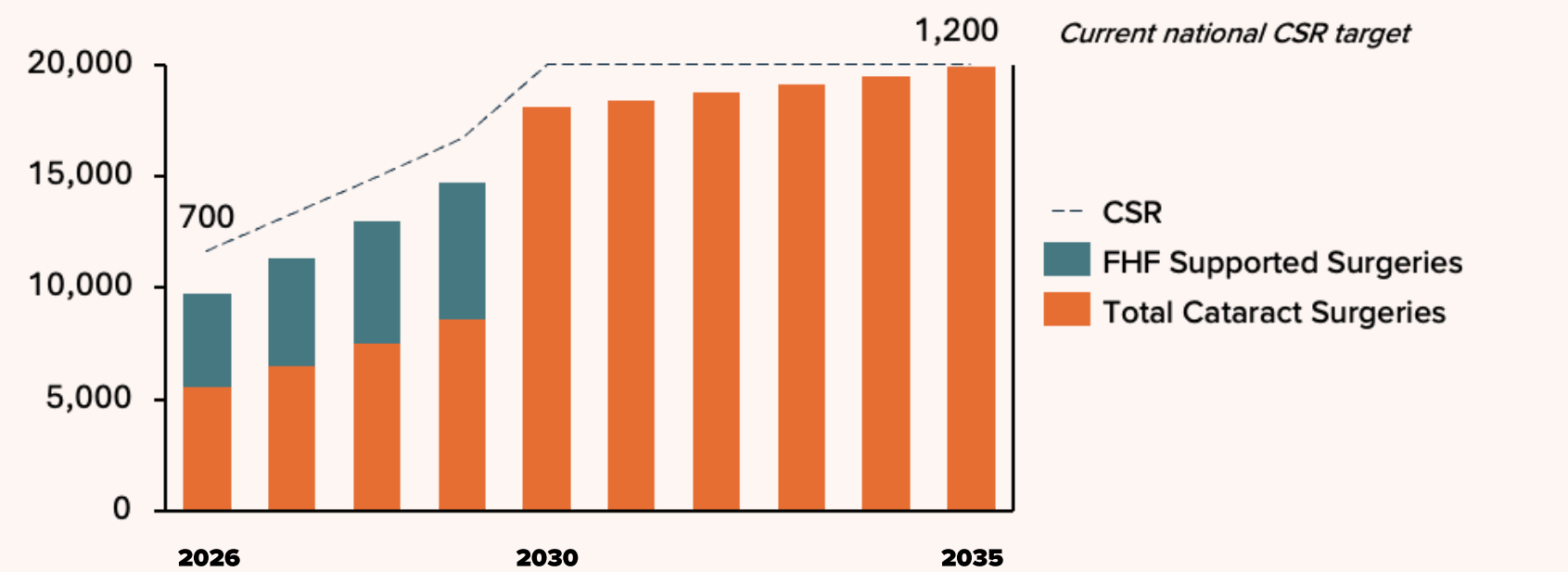
Clear the cataract backlog and build a sustainable eye health system

What our plan requires

US \$41.1 million investment required by 2035...



...to reduce backlog for cataract surgery and maintain our target CSR with a strong health system



What your funding will contribute to

- \$1.9m** Cataract surgeries for 20,588 people, directly supported by The Fred Hollows Foundation.
- \$2.9m** Awareness-raising campaigns, screening and demand generation.
- \$6.3m** Training for 25 ophthalmologists and 45,000 community health workers.

- \$4m** Upgrading, equipping and improving the quality and capacity of training institutions (University of Rwanda and Rwanda International Institute of Ophthalmology).
- \$8m** Setup, equip and deploy personnel to 10 new Secondary Eye Care Units (SEUs) in district hospital.
- \$18m** Manage the ongoing annual operating costs for 14 SEUs (4 existing and 10 new) until 2035.

The return on your investment

Your investment will generate substantial economic and social returns — an evidence-based conviction grounded in analysis by The Foundation and its partners, reinforced by leading academic research.

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



Fewer road crashes

Save lives and prevent injuries by reducing the risk of road traffic accidents by up to 50%



Improved mental health

Reduce depression among individuals with vision impairment and caregivers



Increased longevity

Reduced risk of mortality and comorbidities, particularly among those 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



Improved productivity

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



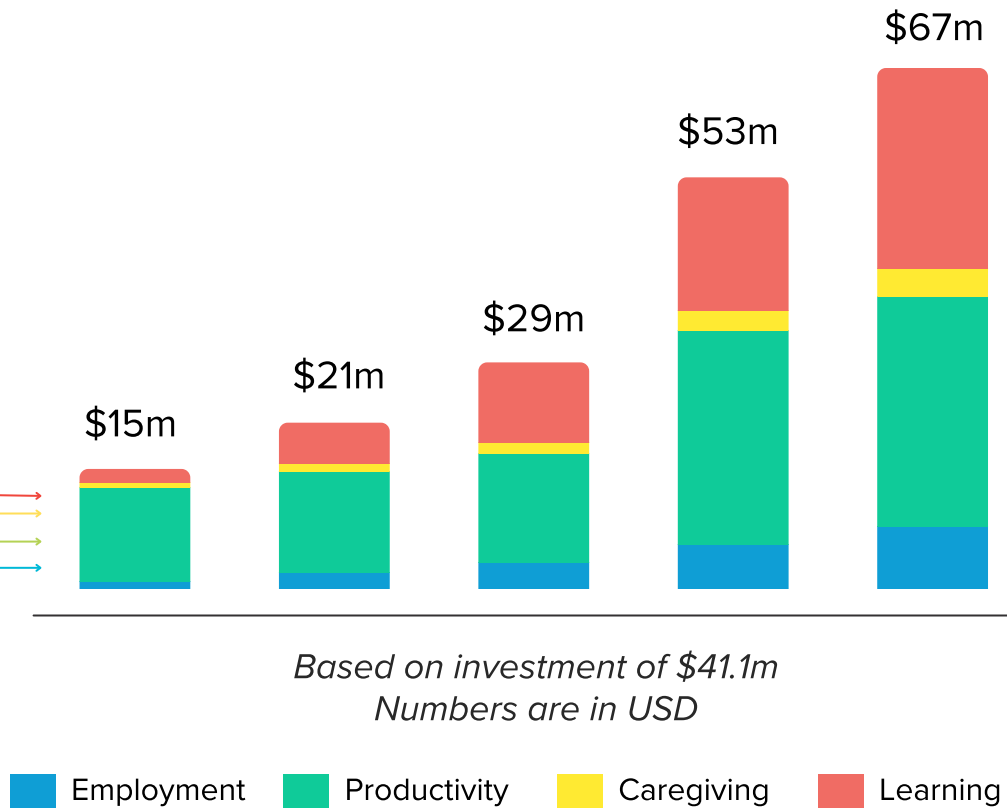
Increased employment

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

The cumulative return on our investment:

\$185m in economic benefits

across improved learning, productivity, employment and reduced caregiving burden in Rwanda. These benefits will continue to grow from 2035 onwards.



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

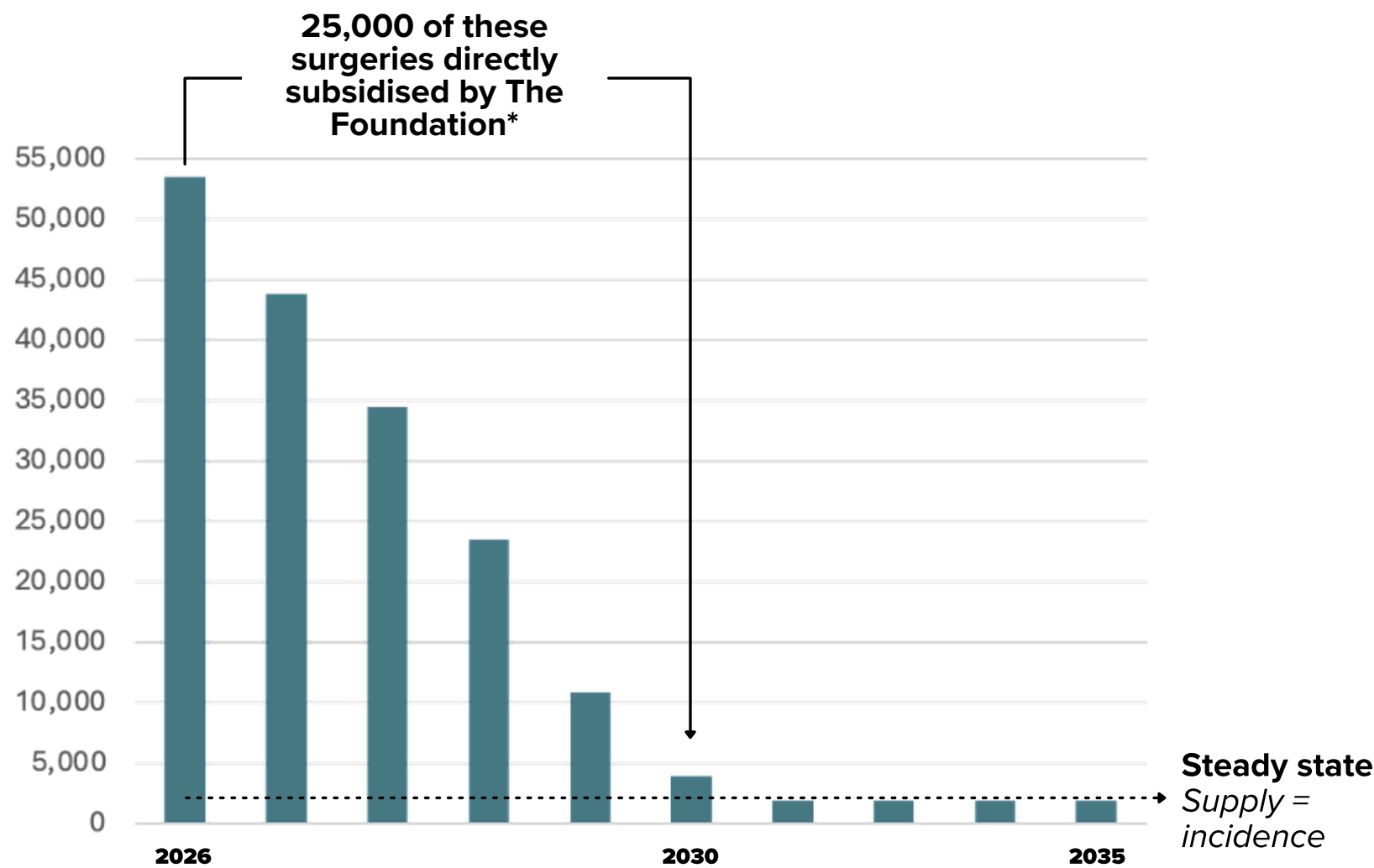
Utilising our world-class research to build the evidence needed for advocacy and policy changes, including research like our investment case.

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 immediate focus on clearing the cataract backlog, whilst making holistic improvements to Rwanda’s health system to sustain beyond 2035.

Cataract backlog in Rwanda



Focus for 2026-2030: Clearing the cataract backlog

Our first scale up focus is on clearing the cataract backlog of people requiring / waiting for cataract surgery to a ‘steady state.’ Based on current projections we can achieve this by 2030.

Focus for 2026-2035 Improve the eye health system

Strengthen the health system to address geographic access, workforce, financing and leadership and governance so that the system can sustainably address cataract incidence and all eye conditions by 2035 onwards.

If we only focused on backlog, the cataract case load would not be sustainable, and the backlog would eventually revert.

**2026-2030 directly supported by The Foundation based on estimates of our current programming and minimum FHF commitment.
CSR baseline: obtained from the Rwanda Health Sector Performance Report 2019-2020.
Updated 2025-2030 Cataract backlog estimates IAPB*

Real people. Real impact.



For six years, 12-year-old Valentine struggled to see the blackboard, read and write.

Her poor vision also made it difficult to play safely, leaving her feeling isolated from her classmates.

Her life changed when Frida, a local Community Health Worker trained in primary eye health by The Fred Hollows Foundation, learned that Valentine kept falling while playing.

Frida examined her and helped connect her with cataract surgery at Kabgayi Eye Unit.

Now, with her sight restored, **Valentine is excited to return to school, write properly and play with her friends again.**

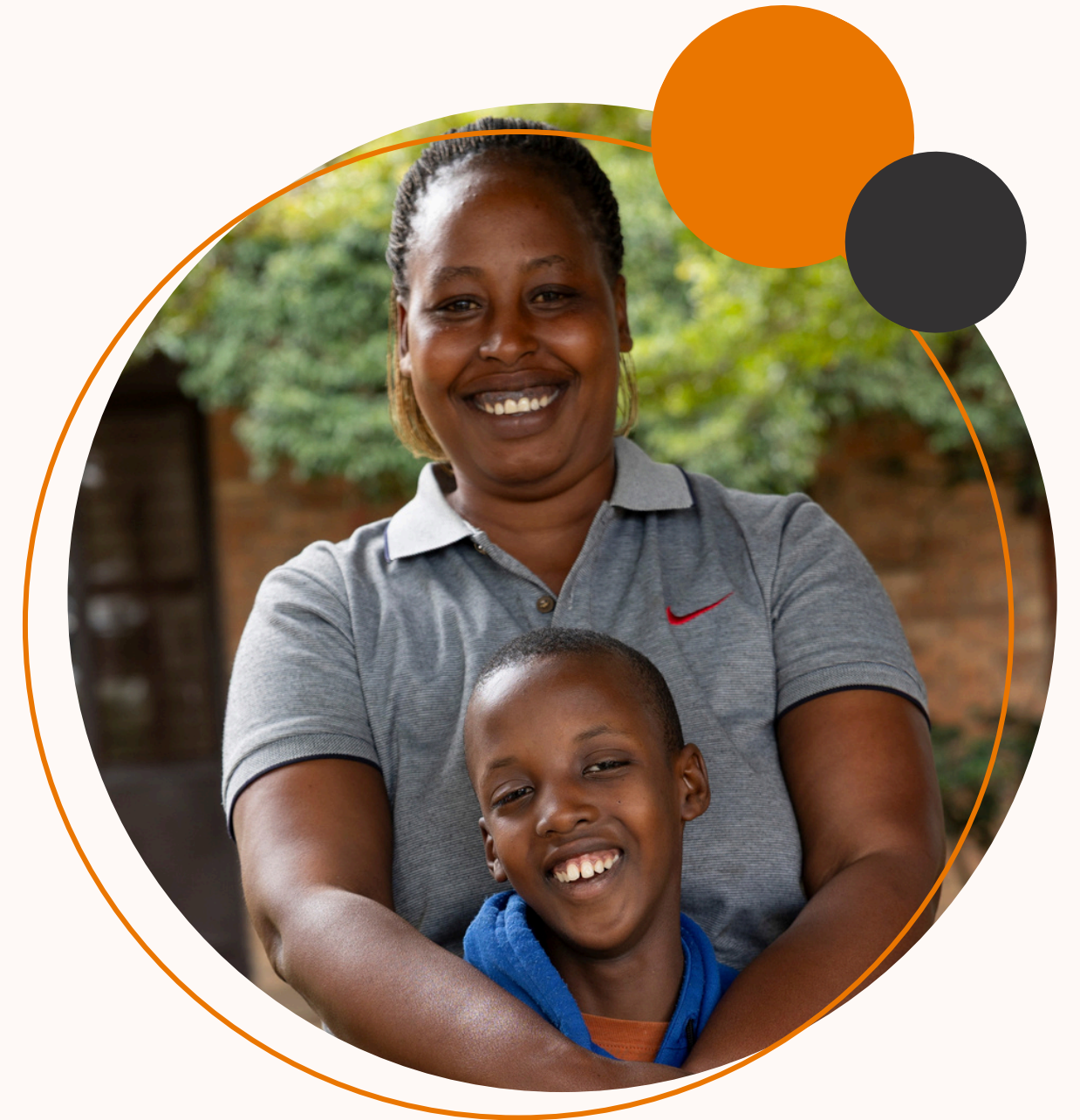
Her mother, Claudine, can also return to work, knowing her daughter can move through the world with greater independence.

“My heart aches with sadness as I watch other children write effortlessly – their eyes clear and focused, while I struggle to read and write.”

— **Valentine**

Community Health Workers like Frida help identify people experiencing vision loss and connect them with appropriate eye care. With support from The Foundation and the Australian NGO Cooperation Program, both Valentine and Athanasie, an older blind woman living with the family, received sight-restoring cataract surgery.

An investment in sight
is an investment
in health,
in equity,
and in the economy.



It's an investment in the lives of millions.
The time to act is now.



Thank You



**The Fred Hollows
Foundation**