

# Implementing Changes in Eye Care for Aboriginal Victorians – an update

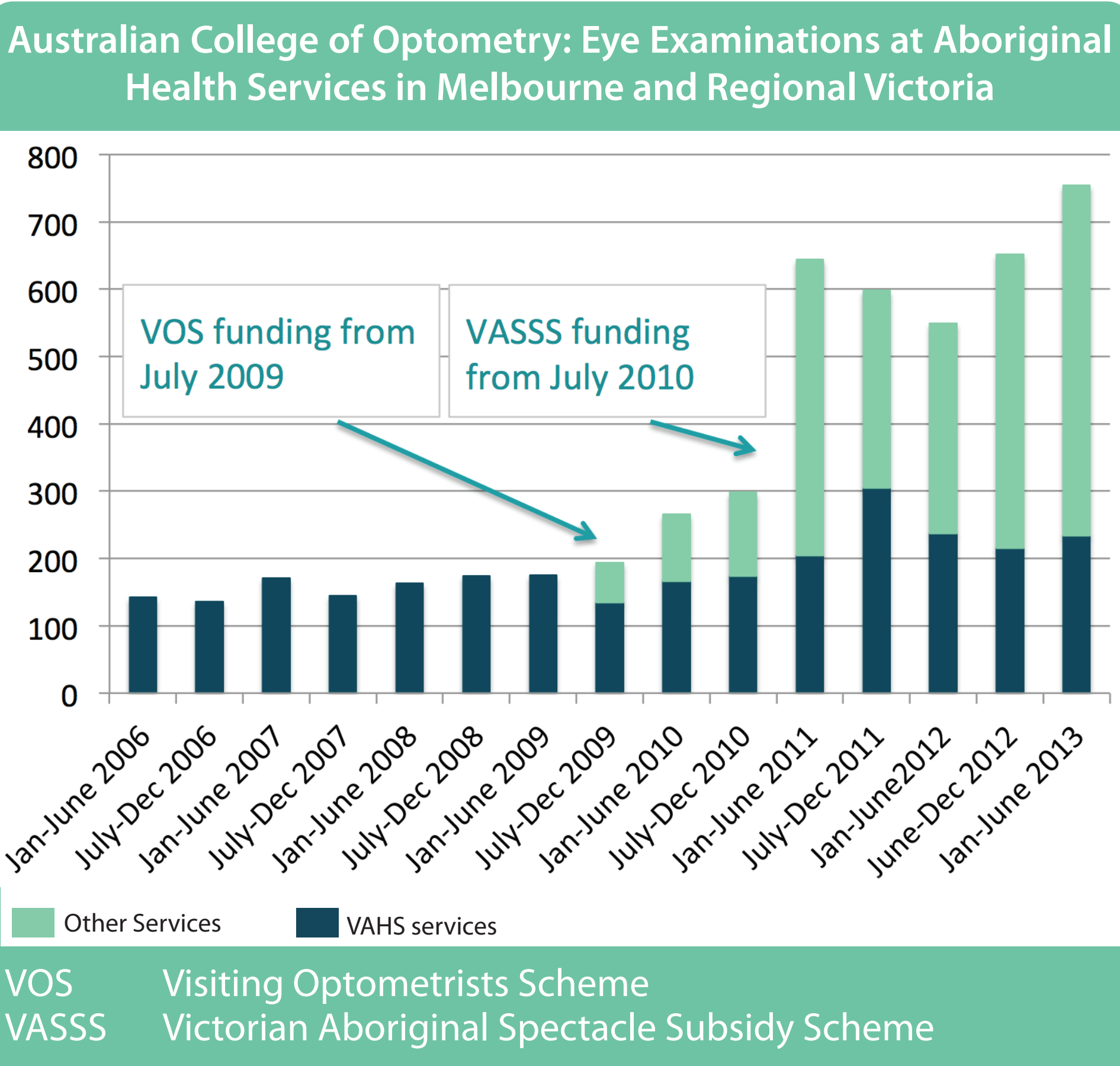
Mitchell D Anjou<sup>1</sup>, Kulan Barney<sup>2</sup>, Melissa Boag<sup>3</sup>, Andrea I Boudville<sup>1</sup>, Genevieve A Napper<sup>4</sup>, Dee Tumino<sup>5</sup>

## Purpose

In Victoria, a state and Commonwealth government supported Aboriginal eye health committee was established in 2010 and recently developed a Victorian Aboriginal eye health strategy (2013).

This paper describes the activities and impacts in Victoria through work of this committee, the stakeholders and implementation of this approach.

The Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision (2012) has provided an Aboriginal health and eye care sector supported national policy framework to eliminate the inequity in Australian Indigenous eye health and supports this approach.



## What the State Committee Has Achieved

The Victorian government committed \$1m over four years in 2009. Three projects were initially developed through the Victorian committee.

Employment of a Statewide Eye Health Project Officer at VACCHO to facilitate improved access to eye care for Aboriginal Victorians, facilitate community awareness programs around the importance of eye health and build the capacity of the Aboriginal eye health workforce

Employment of a Patient Pathways Coordinator at RVEEH to establish referral pathways for Aboriginal patients and reduce barriers to tertiary care

Funding to ACO to administer the Victorian Aboriginal Spectacle Subsidy Scheme (VASSS) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians that allows access to spectacle frames endorsed by Community Elders along with prescribed lenses for a total patient contribution of \$10

In 2012, the VACKH eye health committee prepared an Aboriginal Eye Health Strategy which was endorsed by VACKH in January 2013.

The strategy was also presented to and supported by the State Health Minister. This strategy provides a number of priorities in Victoria aligned to the Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision and Koolin Balit. Progressive regional implementation in Victoria was commenced in 2013.

## Conclusion

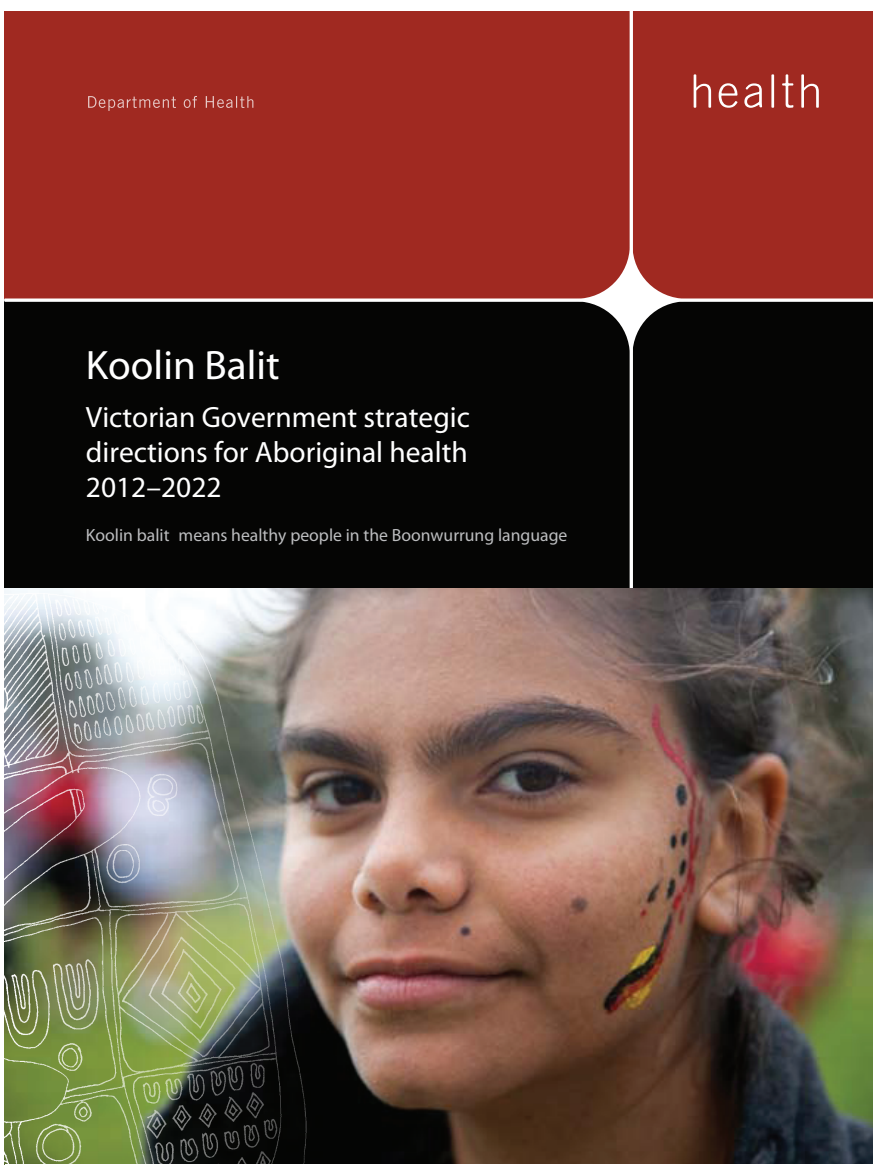
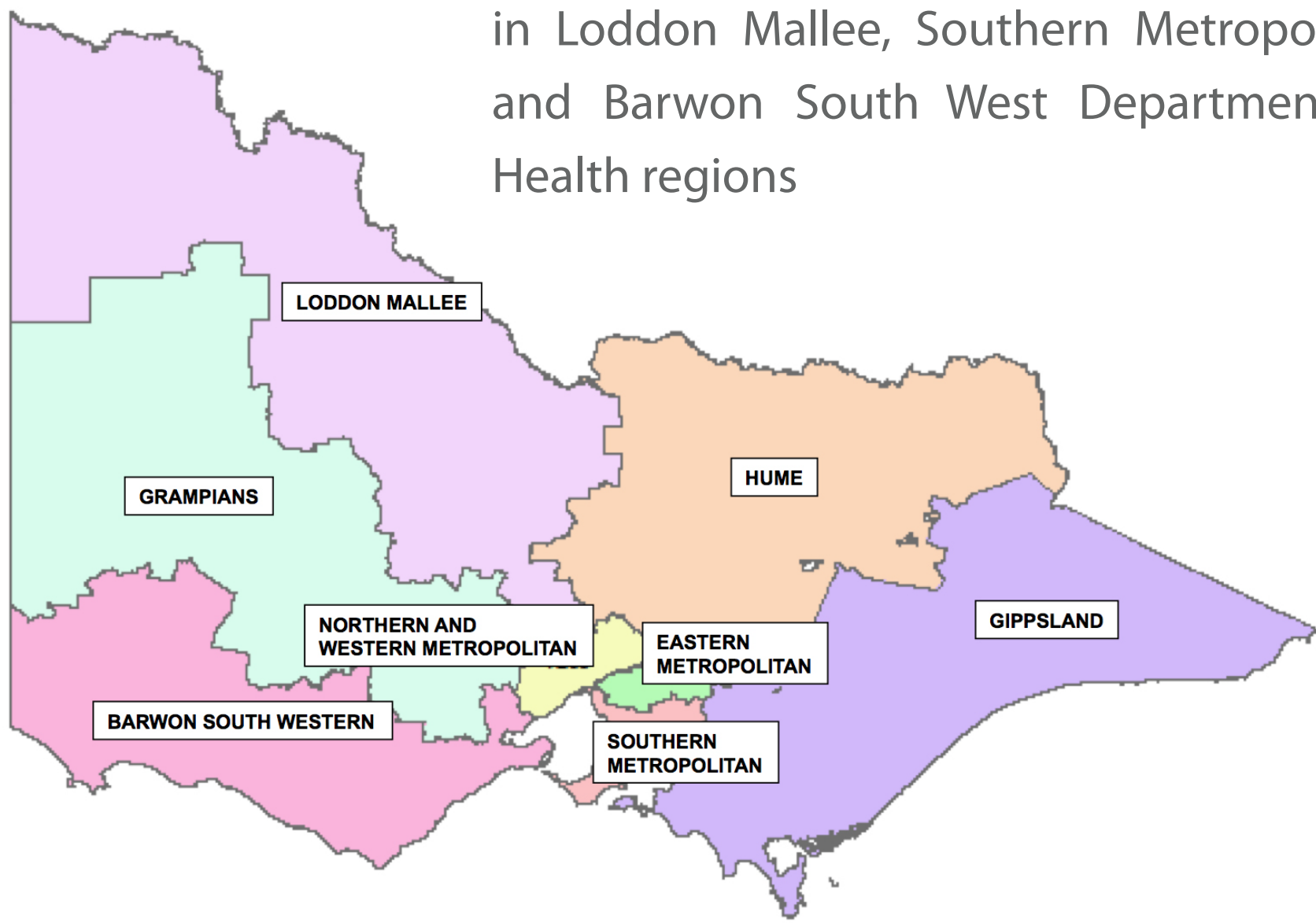
The gap for vision can be closed and requires state level support and collaborative networks of eye care stakeholders to assist with regional implementation.

A further investment of \$1.5m over four years was announced in 2013 towards further eye care initiatives within the Koolin Balit.

This includes the continuation of both the Statewide Eye Health Project Officer at VACCHO and the Victorian Aboriginal Spectacle Subsidy Scheme.

Additional projects to enable regional implementation of the Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision in Victoria have been proposed.

Regional implementation has commenced in Loddon Mallee, Southern Metropolitan and Barwon South West Department of Health regions



## The Victorian Aboriginal Eye Health Committee

A Victorian state wide Aboriginal eye health committee was established in 2010 drawing together key government and non government stakeholders in Indigenous eye health.

The committee was established under the VACKH (Victorian Advisory Committee for Koori Health) structure with an initial purpose to provide overview of specific Indigenous eye health funds through the Closing the Health Gap initiative.

The VACKH is the Victorian Aboriginal health planning forum established

initially in the mid 1990s under the National Framework Agreements with state based tripartite forums involving representatives from Indigenous communities, state/territory governments and the Commonwealth.

Importantly the state affiliate VACCHO (Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation) and Aboriginal communities have provided support and endorsement of the committee and this approach.

In late 2013, the VACKH eye health committee has now become a special purpose group connected to the Victorian Department of Health Working Group for Aboriginal Health aligned with the state Aboriginal health strategic directions document, Koolin Balit.

## Key Stakeholders in the Committee

|                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Victorian Government – Department of Health: Aboriginal Health Branch (secretariat), Aged Care                  |
| Australian Government – Department of Health and Ageing: Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health |
| Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)                                          |
| Australian College of Optometry (ACO)                                                                           |
| The University of Melbourne: Indigenous Eye Health Unit (IEHU)                                                  |
| Vision 2020 Australia                                                                                           |
| Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital (RVEEH)                                                                    |
| Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS)                                                                      |
| Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO)                                           |
| Vision Australia                                                                                                |

