

Optometry and optometrists improving eye care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people Eastern Melbourne region | May 2019



Introduction

Indigenous Eye Health (IEH) at the University of Melbourne is a small translational research group advocating for and supporting reform in Indigenous eye care across Australia.

This communication is specifically written by IEH for optometrists providing eye care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients in Eastern Melbourne.

The issue

The National Indigenous Eye Health Survey in 2008 found that Indigenous adults had six times more blindness and three times more vision loss than non-Indigenous Australians.

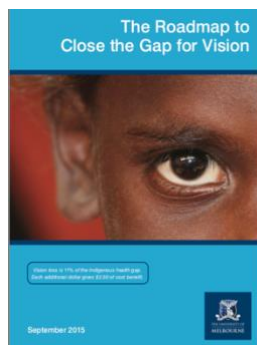
While the latest National Eye Health Survey (2016) showed improvements, including that blindness rates had halved, rates of both blindness and vision loss still remain higher than for non-Indigenous adults.

In Victoria, the main conditions contributing to blindness and vision loss for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are:

- **Refractive error:** Causes 63% of vision loss
- **Cataract:** Causes 27% of vision loss and 32% of blindness
- **Diabetic Retinopathy:** Accounts for 12% of vision loss and 14 times higher rates of blindness

The solution

To address these issues, *The Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision* was published in 2012, and contains 42 sector-endorsed and evidence-based recommendations at national, jurisdictional and regional levels. Twelve (12) regional networks have been established in Victoria and bring together stakeholders involved along the eye care pathway to support improvement and reform. These groups are working to collectively identify barriers to access and priority areas for improvement that can be addressed regionally. Aboriginal health services and community organisations are central to these groups.



Regional network

The Eastern Metropolitan Indigenous Eye Health Group was formed in 2018 and members are now working to address identified gaps in the region. This includes raising awareness of eye health and eye health services, increasing access to services across the eye care pathway, and improving communication and coordination between health services.

If you would like more information, are interested in participating in your local Indigenous eye health network, or would like to discuss how you can help, please contact us at indigenous-eyehealth@unimelb.edu.au

What you can do to help?

Most of the Indigenous vision loss and blindness is considered preventable or treatable. As a local optometrist you can facilitate efforts to improve Indigenous eye care and close the vision gap by:

Improving cultural safety and 'asking the question'

Improving cultural safety within health care settings can help to support improved patient access and outcomes in eye care.

In addition, to make sure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients receive the clinical care they need, and access to available supports and services, it is important to ask the question "Are you of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin?" of all clients who access your services.

A number of resources are available to support improving cultural safety and asking the question within practices - for example, the Inner North West Primary Care Partnership Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health resources:

<http://inwpcp.org.au/resources/closing-the-health-gap-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people/>

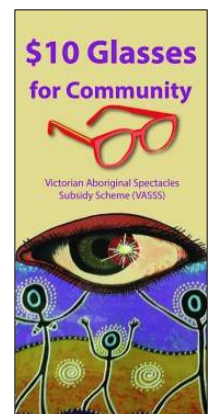
Reduce barriers to receiving eye examinations and glasses

There are a number of ways to support access to eye exams and glasses, including bulk-billing for consultations, minimising additional testing fees and offering low-cost spectacles within practices.

There are also a number of Government-funded programs available in Victoria to support better access, including:

Victorian Aboriginal Spectacles Subsidy Scheme (VASSS)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Victoria can access spectacles through the VASSS for a \$10 patient contribution. The program is funded by the Victorian Government and run by the Australian College of Optometry, in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and a network of optometrists across Victoria.



If you are aware of Aboriginal clients who may be missing out on spectacles, please direct/refer them to the ACO or a local optometrist participating in the VASSS. For more information, call the ACO on (03) 9349 7000

Low Cost Eye Services – including outreach clinics

Subsidised eye care is offered to financially and otherwise disadvantaged Victorians by the Australian College of Optometry. Aboriginal clients can access services in the ACO's Carlton clinic or via **outreach clinics** at Aboriginal organisations and Community Health Services across the Eastern Melbourne region. This includes access to the VASSS and can assist clients who may otherwise miss out on eye examinations or spectacles due to cost barriers.

For more information contact the service directly:

Outreach optometry clinics are delivered at:
Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association
P: 5962 2940
Yarra Valley Health (Healesville Hospital)
P: 5957 1100 (Aboriginal Health team)
EACH Special Focus Clinics, Ringwood East
P: 9837 3900
Inspiro Community Health, Lilydale
P: 9738 8801
Australian College of Optometry Outreach Team
www.aco.org.au/eye-care-services/referrals
P: (03) 9349 7400
E: outreach@aco.org.au

Offering referral to a local public ophthalmology service to reduce barriers associated with cost and travel

Eastern Health's public Ophthalmology Clinic at Lilydale is available for consultations and a range of procedures including non-complex cataract surgery. Referrals can be made for assessment, treatment and/or follow up care.

Details available at:

<https://www.easternhealth.org.au/services/item/638-yarra-ranges-health-ophthalmology-service>

Eastern Health Ophthalmology Clinic
Clinic Eye Care Coordinator
P: (03) 8706 9738
E: Eye.ElectiveSurgery@easternhealth.org.au

Linking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients with additional support to access hospital and other services

Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officers

Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officers (AHLOs) work in most Victorian public hospitals and can provide support to Aboriginal patients and their families accessing hospital services. It is important to explicitly identify your client's Indigenous status on referral forms or letters so that they can be linked up with the AHLO or other support services. Contact AHLOs in the Eastern Melbourne region:

Eastern Health
P: (03) 5957 1100
Austin Hospital
P: (03) 9496 5834
Royal Victorian Eye & Ear Hospital
E: Aboriginal.Health@eyeandear.org.au

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Care Coordination Services

Care coordination teams work in community health services in the Eastern Melbourne region. They provide support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients with chronic disease to access primary and specialist care, including

optometry if required. Aboriginal Care Coordination teams can be contacted at:

Eastern Health Aboriginal Health Team
P: (03) 5957 1100
E: AHTintake@easternhealth.org.au
EACH (Community Health)
P: (03) 9757 6200 and ask to speak to the Aboriginal Health Team
E: AboriginalHealthTeam.eachVIC@each.com.au

Providing accessible eye health information to clients

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) eye health brochures

VACCHO, the peak body representing Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations in Victoria, has produced a series of brochures provide accessible eye care information on:

- Cataract
- Diabetes
- Refractive error
- Smoking and
- The Victorian Aboriginal Subsidised Spectacles Scheme (VASSS)

Visit <https://www.vaccho.org.au/wd/eh/resources/>



Check Today, See Tomorrow resources



These resources were developed to increase awareness about diabetes eye care and the need for Aboriginal people with diabetes to have a YEARLY eye check to help prevent vision loss and blindness.



Visit www.iehu.unimelb.edu.au to order or download free resources

Further information about *The Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision* and Indigenous Eye Health can be found at www.iehu.unimelb.edu.au

We welcome your comment, feedback and dialogue to Indigenous-EyeHealth@unimelb.edu.au
Or via 03 83449320

