

Australian Government – Eye Health Policy and Programmes Handout

Indigenous Eye Health Unit - Roundtable 13 March 2014

The Australian Government recognises that poor eye health has a significant impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's lives, education and employment opportunities.

- *The Closing the Gap—Improving Eye and Ear Health Services for Indigenous Australians* measure provides \$66 million over four years, from 2013–14.
- The Eye Health component aims to:
 - reduce the prevalence of trachoma, a preventable eye disease that can cause blindness;
 - provide trachoma surveillance and reporting across Australia;
 - provide access to expert advice on Indigenous eye health issues;
 - increase access to eye care services; and
 - ultimately improve Indigenous children's school attendance and employment opportunities.

Government Review of Expenditure

- The Government is considering grant programmes in line with its priorities and to ensure that Indigenous programmes achieve real, positive change to the lives of Aboriginal people.
- Funding beyond 2013–14 for a range of programmes, including eye health, is part of the review.

Trachoma

- Australia is on track to eliminate trachoma by 2020, with prevalence rates in 5-9 year olds in screened communities falling from 14% in 2009 to 4% in 2012.
- There are hotspots that require continued effort and the Commonwealth is providing ongoing funding for trachoma control activities in NSW, NT, SA and WA through the multilateral Project Agreement on Improving Trachoma Control Services for Indigenous Australians. This agreement was signed on 5 February 2014.
- New National Guidelines for the Management of Trachoma are available at:
[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/D02F0C1C2AB90509CA257C66001C089C/\\$File/trachoma-SoNG-Jan2014.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/D02F0C1C2AB90509CA257C66001C089C/$File/trachoma-SoNG-Jan2014.pdf)
- The National Trachoma Surveillance and Reporting Unit (NTSRU) is currently hosted at the Kirby Institute at the University of New South Wales. The NTSRU collects and collates trachoma surveillance and monitoring data from jurisdictions with trachoma and produces an annual Australian Trachoma Surveillance Report. The report using 2013 data will be published mid-2014.

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Indigenous Eye Health Unit, University of Melbourne

- Has contributed expert advice to the knowledge base for improving the eye health of Indigenous Australians.
- 2013-14 partnership with the Australian Government and Department of Health to provide:
 - expert advice on Indigenous eye health policy issues;
 - Development of Indigenous eye care resources;
 - Technical support on trachoma control activities;
 - Stakeholder engagement; and
 - Coordination of Indigenous eye care programmes and services.

Cataract Surgery

- Fred Hollows Foundation (FHF) conducted cataract surgery intensives in Darwin, Katherine and Dubbo in 2013-14, following previous Australian Government investment in cataract surgery in Central Australia and the Barkly regions of the NT.
- FHF leads the Central Australia and Barkly Integrated Eye Health Strategy (CABIEHS), as a partnership of service providers so that people in those regions have better access to eye care services.
- Cataract surgery blitzes have reduced surgery waiting lists in Central Australia and the Barkly.

Visiting Optometrists Scheme (VOS)

- Improves access to optometry services in rural and remote communities.
- 2009-10: VOS expansion for Indigenous Australians to provide additional services to people in Indigenous communities, for whom there is an increased prevalence of eye disease.
- The new arrangements for the VOS program are subject to the Government's consideration. Decisions around the timing of any announcement are a matter for the Government.
- The location of VOS services is available on the Rural and Regional Health Australia (RRHA) website:
<http://www.ruralhealthaustralia.gov.au/internet/rha/publishing.nsf/Content/aboutUs>

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Medical Outreach Indigenous Chronic Disease Package (MOICDP)

- Funding for medical specialists, general practice and allied health outreach services to Indigenous people living in urban, rural, regional and remote Australia.
- Priority areas: diabetes; cardiovascular disease; chronic respiratory disease; chronic kidney disease and cancer.
- Eye health services can be provided for patients suffering from conditions related to diabetes.

Rural Health Outreach Fund (RHOF)

- Improves access to medical specialists, GPs, allied and other health providers in rural, regional and remote areas.
- Four health priorities: eye health; maternity and paediatric health; mental health; and chronic disease management.
- Funds may be provided for the cost of travel, accommodation, meals and incidentals, facility fees, administrative support at the outreach location, cultural training, lease of equipment, absence from practice allowance and workforce support.

Medicare Locals

- The Australian Government is currently considering the outcomes of the Review of Medicare Locals to ensure funding is being spent as effectively and efficiently as possible. The Review has three components: a review of the functioning of Medicare Locals; an independent financial audit of all Medicare Locals; and stakeholder feedback on the role and functioning of Medicare Locals.

Practice Incentive Programme (PIP)

- PIP Guidelines released in August 2013 include a section on eye health, recommending assessment and referral if required.
- In January 2014, diabetic retinopathy was included in the PIP Guidelines to give a more complete picture of eye health.

Medical Benefits Scheme (MBS)

- MBS Item 715 - adult health assessment now includes taking a history of the patient's eye health and conducting an eye examination.

Future Directions

Partnership Approach

- The Department of Health recognises that improving the eye health of Indigenous Australians requires a partnership by key stakeholders.
- This partnership approach is critical to:
 - Developing policy responses that are tailored to individual community and regional needs;
 - Developing strategies to encourage eye care programmes to complement each other and reflect the patient journey through the health system;
 - Using available data to identify community need for eye care services;
 - Building capacity in service systems to deliver sustainable eye care services over time; and
 - Exploring and utilising emerging technologies.
- The Department is keen to hear your ideas on other partnership opportunities.