

Strong eyes, strong communities – overview

OUTCOMES



Expanded community capacity & leadership



A sustainable, world class system providing culturally safe & accessible eye care



Equity of access & outcomes in eye health achieved & maintained

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION, BUILDING ON ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

- Second national eye health survey
- Continue AIHW annual reporting
- Report to COAG on progress

EXPAND MAINSTREAM SERVICES

- Increase funding flexibility
- Sustain & expand outreach services
- Increase low vision services
- National approach to children's vision
- Better access to affordable treatment & glasses
- More equipment
- ACCHO led eye care models

- Renewed jurisdictional commitment to addressing barriers to priority services
- Embed jurisdictional, regional and local approaches
- Supporting people to access care

- Embed cultural safety through all mainstream services
- Leverage existing initiatives and investments that are strengthening eye care in mainstream services
- Increase awareness of eye health & access to eye health professionals, information & resources
- Embed eye health in practice & patient management systems
- Deliver eye health programs through ACCHOs
- Deliver targeted ACCHO workforce development and ongoing peer support network to build and sustain local capacity

- Strengthen environmental health activities to support key elements of SAFE strategy
- Agree longer term remote housing strategy
- Enhance maintenance & repairs to water hardware
- Embed trachoma & trichiasis care in ACCHOs & other Aboriginal primary care services

ENHANCED COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND CONTROL



UNDERPINNING PRINCIPLES



Recommendations for implementation

Strong eyes, strong communities: a five year plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision 2019-24

Across Australia, too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still experience avoidable vision loss and blindness, and those who have lost vision often find it difficult to access the support and services they need.

For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are three times as likely as non-Indigenous people to be blind or have low vision and on average, currently wait 63% longer for cataract surgery.

Strong eyes, strong communities: a five year plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision charts a course to close the gap for vision and achieve a world class system of eye health and vision care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Based on available evidence and shaped by the collective input of many individuals and organisations, *Strong eyes, strong communities* describes an integrated suite of activities that need to be progressed over the coming five years. In combination, these will

- expand service delivery,
- strengthen partnerships and local supports,
- embed eye care into community controlled and mainstream services,
- eliminate trachoma, and
- sustain the focus on monitoring progress.

This blueprint for change recognises that improving eye health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is everybody's business, and that the collective efforts of governments, communities, service providers and others are essential.

Vision 2020 Australia has developed the following 24 recommendations to guide implementation of *Strong eyes, strong communities*.

While some of these require new funding, a range of others require renewed engagement with all levels of government and a combination of policy, administrative and/or system change. **An active partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and people through all of these is essential.**

Strong eyes, strong communities is a blueprint for change, collaboration and improvement. Together, a world class system that delivers culturally safe eye care to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is within our reach.

Vision 2020 Australia recommendations

To enhance service delivery, Vision 2020 Australia recommends that the Australian Government:

- Commit to continuation of outreach funding for the coming 5 year period.
- Expand Visiting Optometrists Scheme funding by an additional \$1.06 million in 2019-20 increasing to an additional \$5.223 million annually by 2023-24. \$18.1m over 5 years
- Expand Rural Health Outreach Funding by an additional \$1.04 million from 2019-20. \$5.5m over 5 years
- Review outreach program guidelines for eye care in 2019 to maximise funding flexibility, address practical barriers to local access and support innovation.
- Fund a project commencing in 2019-20 to co-design, implement and evaluate ACCHO led models of eye care so that opportunities for community leadership in eye care are maximised. \$4.6m over 5 years
- Support development of a national strategy to promote the early identification and management of vision problems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Address equipment needs identified through phase 1 of the National Eye Care Equipment Inventory Project in 2019 then support roll out of priorities identified through phase 2 from 2020. \$5.4m over 5 years
- Continue work with states and territories and NACCHO towards nationally consistent arrangements for the provision of affordable glasses and other optical aids to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who need them through phased expansion of current schemes from 2021-22. \$10.8m over 5 years
- Increase the timeliness of and access to cataract surgery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia
- Improve the timeliness and affordability of diagnosis of and treatment for diabetic retinopathy, including intravitreal injections, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who need them through changes that increase funding for and availability of both treatment and associated medications.
- Work with the National Disability Insurance Agency, the Department of Health (aged care), representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and sector partners to improve access to low vision services and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are blind or vision impaired.

To strengthen the regional partnerships and local supports that will sustain long term improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait eye health and vision care, Vision 2020 Australia recommends that the Australian Government:

- Fund local support for people to access the eye care they need from 2019-20, recognising that this is critical to both keep people engaged in treatment and maximise the effectiveness of available outreach and other services. \$26.2m over 5 years
- Allocate funding for part time regional implementation managers in 25 regions from 2019-20 for two years to build effective local pathways to care and address local service gaps. \$5.1m over 5 years
- Strengthen Integrated Team Care guidelines to ensure eye health is a core element of the care that is coordinated.
- Actively encourage states and territories to renew their commitment to senior participation in jurisdictional eye health committees to actively address jurisdictional level barriers to timely care and achieve equitable eye health outcomes.

To further embed eye care in ACCHOs and other health care services, Vision 2020 Australia recommends that the Australian Government:

- Establish a funding pool to support eye health training for ACCHO staff and development of a national network of ACCHO eye health contacts as part of developing sustainable, local eye health expertise. \$5.4m over 5 years
- Support development of a public awareness campaign to raise understanding and awareness across the primary health workforce about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health, vision care and available services and connect them to local eye health professionals, resources and supports.
- Support amendments to clinical software packages, so that eye health is consistently integrated into routine patient management across all primary care services.

To eliminate trachoma by 2020, prevent its re-emergence and ensure those who require future treatment can access it, Vision 2020 Australia recommends that the Australian Government:

- Continue work with state and territory housing authorities and Aboriginal communities to ensure all housing programs are underpinned by housing for health principles and include a sustained investment in the operation, repair and maintenance of water hardware.
- Work with State and Territory Governments to support continued and expanded roles for environmental health workers in embedding elements of the SAFE strategy.
- Agree a long term investment plan to achieve safe and affordable remote housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Support trachoma and trichiasis training for primary care staff who work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly ACCHO staff.

To monitor progress and ensure that the investments made positively impact on the eye health and vision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Vision 2020 Australia recommends that the Australian Government:

- Continue support to AIHW for national oversight through its annual report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and that this is provided to the Council of Australian Governments via the COAG Health Council and its advisory body, the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council.
- Fund a 2020 national eye health survey to support national data collection. \$ 4.4m

Total new funding of \$85.5 million over 5 years, alongside a range of policy and program changes and action by state, territory and Australian governments, is needed to deliver these recommendations and achieve sustained improvements in eye health and vision outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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