

East Asia Vision Program: Timor-Leste

Year two progress summary



Photo courtesy of the National Eye Centre, Dili

East Asia Vision Program

The East Asia Vision Program (EAVP) is a three-year program (2013-15) funded by the Australian Government. It involves Vision 2020 Australia Global Consortium members working together with country partners in Cambodia, Timor-Leste and Vietnam to reduce avoidable blindness and vision loss with a focus on strengthening the eye health workforce.

The program in Timor-Leste supports eye health workers through access to training and mentoring with appropriate local and international specialists and supervised clinic and outreach services.

Eye health in Timor-Leste

- Around **61,100** people over 40 are **vision impaired**, including **14,100** who are **blind**.
- Over **61 per cent** of people with **disability** are **vision impaired**.
- Blindness and vision loss is **twice as high** in rural than urban areas.
- **Workforce shortages** in the health sector, including in eye health, are a **critical issue**.

Timor-Leste key achievements

- The *National Eye Health Strategy (2012-2017)* completed and expected to be endorsed in 2015.
- **147 capacity strengthening activities** completed in 2014; over half of participants were women.
- Training and curriculum development and recognition of qualifications to bring eye care workers in line with Ministry of Health's career regime.
- **14,821 patients accessed eye health screening** nationally; 48 per cent were women.
- **8,581 treatments and surgeries** have been delivered across Timor-Leste.

Governance, leadership and collaboration

- Consultations and drafting of a National Eye Health Strategy. To be finalised and endorsed in 2015.
- The Head of Non-Communicable Diseases unit at the Ministry of Health (MoH) co-facilitated part of a workshop on transition/sustainability planning with Consortium members and local partners.
- Consultations on a sustainability plan and establishment of a sustainability committee to address the long-term transition of the management of the eye health sector to the Timor-Leste Government reducing dependency on external technical and financial support for eye health services.

Eye health workforce development



Photo courtesy of Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

Training of eye health personnel

Capacity building activities in 2013 and 2014:

- 267 clinical and technical training
- 298 individual training activities
- 13 'train-the-trainer' training activities
- 29 management, communication and leadership training

Some key EAVP activities in 2014 include:

- Successful mentoring of 121 health post nurses and 25 district eye care nurses.
- Training National Eye Centre (NEC) staff on how to use a new eye health database which now collects eye health data for the first time and provides reporting for the National Health Management Information System.
- Ongoing training and mentoring of one Timorese ophthalmologist and four Timorese trainee ophthalmologists through the delivery of the Post Graduate Diploma of Ophthalmology.
- New enrolments for longer term training in 2014 include:
 - 20 primary school teachers trained in Braille instruction;
 - six people receiving module-based training in orientation and mobility; and
 - 12 nurses and allied ophthalmic personnel in certificate level essential eye care and refraction.

Curriculum development

The curriculums for the Post Graduate Diploma in Eye Care and the Post Graduate Diploma in Ophthalmology have been developed. The development of in-service training programs: Certificate III in Essential Eye Care and Certificate IV in Refraction, have involved the National Institute for Health (INS).

Eye health data management

Five staff have been trained to use the new NEC eye health database. A user manual has also been developed to support its ongoing use. The database is used to capture NEC patient information and reports are provided to the MoH for inclusion in the National Health Management Information System. Data analysis has improved capacity to analyse potential issues around inclusive access to eye health services.



Photo courtesy of National Eye Centre, Dili

Service delivery

With support from the EVAP the NEC Outreach Team conducted the following in 2014:

- 14,821 patients screened nationally;
- 8,581 sight saving treatments delivered nationally (a 20 per cent increase from 2013), which were primarily dispensing spectacles to correct refractive error as well as 1,094 surgical interventions;
- coordinated outreach to simultaneously provide mentoring and supervision of trainees and district health workers by international experts in eye health and provide access to services; and
- as trainees graduate and gain clinical skills and experience, the sustainability plan focuses on a reduction in the reliance on external support for service delivery.

Inclusive eye health

The EAVP was designed to contribute to the development of a quality, sustainable and equitable eye health service in Timor-Leste. Key inclusive eye health initiatives include:

- A section in the new curriculum for junior doctors and eye care workers on working responsibly with children, gender equity and disability inclusion.
- In 2014, 53 per cent of capacity strengthening and training activity participants were women and 48 per cent of screening and treatments were delivered to women.
- Supporting women's continued higher education by building flexibility into the post graduate diploma in ophthalmology course structure.
- Collaboration with disability-focused organisations to raise awareness of outreach eye care services, resulting in an increase in people with disability accessing these services.
- Empowering children with vision impairment through access to education, with primary school teachers now trained in inclusive education methods, braille mathematics and modifying curriculums where required.
- Strengthening the capacity of Timorese orientation and mobility trainers and close collaboration with disability organisations.

Looking forward

During 2015, the EAVP will continue to help build a stronger Timorese-led eye health sector by:

- formalising a sustainability plan for the long-term management of eye health by the MoH;
- providing training and mentoring for new NEC based Timorese ophthalmologists, eye care workers, district eye care community health and vision rehabilitation workers across the country;
- provision of service delivery through the NEC and outreach programs;
- facilitating professional and technical mentoring during outreach services by combining supervised practical learning opportunities with better access to eye health services; and
- supporting MoH and Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e (UNTL) to work towards recognition and criteria for career progression and professional development of eye health workers.

Following results represent the combined achievement of the Consortium organisations working in Cambodia, Timor-Leste and Vietnam as part of the EAVP in 2014:

- **Building capacity:** 1,407 training activities to improve the skills of eye health workers.
- **Curriculum development:** five training modules and six curriculums have been developed and two training modules and three curriculums have been updated. Training content covers core eye health personnel training including basic eye doctor, ophthalmic nurse training and social responsibility.
- **Governance and leadership:** establishment, coordination and leadership of the eye health sector through Prevention of Blindness committees and provincial eye health strategies and planning. Strengthening of management skills, improved coordination between medical universities and establishment of continuing professional development learning events.
- **Building locally led research capacity:** training and mentor relationships with eye health research leaders.



Photos courtesy of the Brien Holden Vision Institute, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and CBM Australia

EAVP Timor-Leste Program partners

The Program's partners include the Ministry of Health, National Eye Centre, Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e, The National Institute for Health, East Timor Blind Union, Halibur Deficiente Matan Timor-Leste, Fuan Nabilan and Fo Naroman Timor-Leste and Hospital Nacional Guido.

Vision 2020 Australia Global Consortium

Established in 2009, the Vision 2020 Australia Global Consortium is a partnership of Australian eye health and vision care organisations involved in implementing programs in Asia and the Pacific.

Consortium members use comprehensive and harmonised approaches to support the development of quality eye care and vision-related disability services in close partnership with local governments and organisations. The Vision 2020 Australia Global Consortium members are:



An Australian partnership working to eliminate avoidable blindness and reduce the impact of vision loss in our region

The Global Consortium members implementing the EAVP in Timor-Leste are The Fred Hollows Foundation and the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. For more information visit www.vision2020australia.org.au