

East Asia Vision Program: Vietnam

Year two progress summary



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Brien Holden Vision Institute

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.

Eye health in Vietnam

- There are **385,800** people aged over 50 years who are blind and **1,660,000** with low vision.
- The prevalence of disability in Vietnam is relatively high at 7.8 per cent, with **vision disability representing 13.8 per cent of all disability**.
- Provincial Prevention of Blindness Committees have been established in most provinces but need more support to function effectively.

Key achievements in Vietnam

- **805 individual training activities, 540 in 2014**. 65 per cent of these involved either school teachers or commune level health staff in basic low vision detection in four Northern provinces.
- The Ministry of Education and Training approved the **first optometry course curriculum** and the first cohort of students began the program at Pham Ngoc Thac University (PNTU). Introducing the optometry profession in Vietnam will reduce the work burden on eye specialists, allowing them to focus on advanced treatment and care.
- Trainees who completed Train-the-Trainer courses in 2013 have **trained over 129 new trainees and mentored 26 others** in different areas of eye care.
- Medical university partners have increased their cost-share allocation for some training activities and other partners are using refraction course fees to cover course running costs. Costs for trainee mentoring will need to be considered as part of longer term sustainability plans.

Governance, leadership and collaboration

- The EAVP has helped to strengthen collaboration between medical universities through joint activity engagement and functioning of the project management unit involving medical universities and local Prevention of Blindness (PBL) committees in Thua Thien Hue and Thai Binh provinces.
- Development of a common glossary for eye health terms for use nationally will help establish more consistency in eye health language throughout Vietnam.
- A data reporting system has been established between health stations, hospitals and Project Management Unit in Nghe An and Son La.

Eye health workforce development



Training of eye health personnel

Photo courtesy of Brien Holden Vision Institute

Capacity building activities in 2013 and 2014:

- 704 clinical and technical training
- 805 individual training activities
- 51 'train-the-trainer' training activities
- 50 management, communication and leadership training

Some key EAVP activities in 2014 include:

- 42 per cent of clinical training activities were provided to commune health staff and school teachers in low vision detection and functional assessments.
- 53 per cent of the individual training activities in 2014 were for women.
- The first Ministry of Education and Training recognised optometry course opened in Vietnam at Pham Ngoc Thach University in Ho Chi Minh City in October 2014 with an initial intake of 18 students. Hanoi Medical University has also been granted approval to start an optometry course
- Train-the-Trainer (TOT) courses from 2013 are demonstrating positive outcomes in 2014:
 - Low vision TOT graduates trained nine doctors/refractionists/ nurses in basic low vision care.
 - Refraction TOT graduates trained 120 trainees at Vietnam National Institute of Ophthalmology (VNIO) and Ho Chi Minh City Eye Hospital (HCMCEH). They are mentoring a further 26 refractionists.

Curriculum development

Curriculum development for post graduate programs has been conducted in close coordination with the Hue, Hanoi and Thai Binh Medical Universities, Pham Ngoc Thach University, VNIO and HCMCEH. Curriculum development for training of basic eye doctors and ophthalmic nurses are completed and approved. Preventative medicine and general practitioner eye health training modules have also been completed for use at Thai Binh Medical University.

Service delivery

Service delivery activities in Vietnam include the delivery of eye health screening and treatment services in Nghe An and Son La and the upgrading/development of eye care service quality guidelines and service delivery in Nghe An, Son La and through the low vision schools screening program.

- 17,783 people have received eye health screening Nghe An and Son La provinces in 2013 and 2014 (54 per cent were women).
- Low vision screening was held at the Hanoi Nguyen Dinh Chieu School (at VNIO), and the Hai Duong Blind Association (HDBA) and surrounding schools. Referrals were made to VNIO Low Vision Centre if required.
- 24 per cent of clients who attended the VNIO Low Vision Centre were referred from disability support services. Further work to strengthen low vision referral networks is required.
- In 2014 a disabled persons' organisation presented the inclusive eye care model at a national ophthalmology workshop. This model ensures that women affected by poverty, children and people with a disability have access to services and is being implemented in Nghe An and Son La provinces.

Data and research

- Brien Holden Vision Institute conducted operational research on the establishment of optometry education in Vietnam. The results have been used to target future student recruitment and inform curriculum revisions/design.
- Fifteen ophthalmologists and optometrists (11 female) from the VNIO and HCMCEH attended research workshops covering study design, data collection (including the importance of gender disaggregated data) and analysis plans and writing scientific papers.
- Eye health research projects were selected and mentoring relationships between Vietnamese researchers and their Australian mentors have been established. The research projects aim to inform future planning and responses to common causes of vision impairment in Vietnam.

Inclusive eye health

Inclusive development is an integral part of all EAVP activities. Examples of the inclusive approaches and activities implemented by the program in year two include:

- Data is disaggregated by gender and all newly developed training modules and curriculums included content on gender equity.
- CBM Australia continued to work with its provincial partners to introduce an inclusive eye care model and ensure services are accessible for the poor and vulnerable, often including women and people with disabilities.
- Although equal numbers of men and women were screened in 2014, the number of women treated was comparatively lower than men, demonstrating barriers to treatment continue to exist. Addressing these barriers will continue to be a focus in 2015-16.
- An accessibility audit was completed for Moc Chau District Hospital in Son La province and two district hospitals and health centres Nghe An province. A review was also conducted to help strengthen inclusive optical shop services in Son La City and Moc Chau District Hospital.

Looking forward

- Development of paediatric refraction specialists and trainers, training 24 refraction trainers and graduation of and support to fellowships recipients.
- Equipment provided and installed for optometry training facilities at PNTU and wet-lab and refraction practice rooms at the Thai Binh Medical University.
- Supporting partners to develop business plans and cost recovery strategies including reinvestment of training course income into course running costs and for rural based student scholarships.
- Low vision referral pathway promotion and strengthening low vision services in Northern Vietnam.
- Presentation of research results at the 2015 Vietnam National Ophthalmology Conference.

Results across the EAVP Program

Following are the EAVP achievements from Cambodia, Timor-Leste and Vietnam 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. CBM Australia and Royal Australian College of Surgeons.

EAVP Vietnam program partners

The Program's partners include the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Training, the Vietnam National Institute of Ophthalmology (VNIO), provincial authorities in Thai Binh, Nghe An, Son La, Hai Duong and Ninh Binh, Medical Universities in Hue, Thai Binh, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and NGOs (including those working in disability).

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 working as part of the EAVP in Vietnam are The Brien Holden Vision Institute, CBM Australia, The Fred Hollows Foundation and The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists. For more information visit www.vision2020australia.org.au