

Position statement on a nationally consistent approach to subsidised spectacle schemes

Vision 2020 Australia position

Evidence shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults have six times the rate of blindness and three times the rate of vision loss when compared to the non-Indigenous population. Around 94 per cent of vision loss for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is preventable or treatable; however 35 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults have never had an eye exam. In the next 10 years it is estimated that over 34,000 Indigenous Australians will be affected by blindness or vision impairment, 56 per cent of which will be due to uncorrected refractive error.

The Vision 2020 Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee (the Committee) has endorsed the *Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision* (the Roadmap), which provides a comprehensive solution to tackling the elimination of avoidable blindness and vision loss for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, through policy changes to improve the quality and sustainability of eye care services. In particular, the Roadmap proposes the establishment of nationally consistent Indigenous subsidised spectacle schemes that provide low-cost, quality-assured, cost-certain, product-certain spectacles to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Committee has also supported efforts of the Optometry Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Working Group in advocacy to the Australian and jurisdictional governments for all schemes to be aligned with a set of nationally consistent principles and recommended standards for the provision of subsidised spectacles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Developed in consultation with and endorsed by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and its state affiliate organisations, the principles and recommended standards (outlined in full in Appendix A) detail the key elements of subsidised spectacle schemes which would meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people regardless of their location.

Vision 2020 Australia endorses the Optometry Australia *Principles for nationally consistent subsidised spectacle schemes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: Recommended implementation standards*. Given that subsidy schemes are already operational in all Australian jurisdictions, Vision 2020 Australia considers it would be most efficient to build on existing infrastructure in many cases.

A nationally consistent approach to providing subsidised spectacles to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would provide the opportunity to make a dramatic impact in eye health and vision care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country.

Policy context

The 2008 National Indigenous Eye Health Survey (NIEHS) reports that 54 per cent of vision loss experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults is due to uncorrected refractive error, and this occurs at a rate five times higher than for non-Indigenous Australians. The Roadmap highlights that access to a good supply of low-cost spectacles is key to addressing this refractive error vision loss.

It is also well established that there are common cultural, financial and/or geographical barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians accessing eye care and needed spectacles. As a result, there is a resounding need for a good supply system for spectacles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to overcome some of these barriers.

Although subsidised spectacle schemes are currently operational in all jurisdictions, existing schemes have varying, often limited, impact in overcoming access barriers to prescription glasses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Notably however, a targeted scheme in Victoria is recognised as an example of a scheme which meets the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the region.

About Vision 2020 Australia

Established in October 2000, Vision 2020 Australia is part of VISION 2020: The Right to Sight, a global initiative of the World Health Organisation and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness. Vision 2020 Australia is the peak body for the eye health and vision care sector, representing over 50 member organisations involved in: local and global eye care; health promotion; low vision support; vision rehabilitation; eye research; professional assistance and community support.

The Vision 2020 Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee

The Vision 2020 Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee (the Committee) provides a platform for members to collaborate and shape the direction of Vision 2020 Australia's systemic advocacy related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision care. The Committee is working to capitalise on the Australian Government's commitment to eye health and vision care, noting that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health is a key priority of the *Implementation plan under the National Framework for Action to Promote Eye Health and Prevent Avoidable Blindness and Vision Loss* (NFIP). The Committee also assists the Australian Government to identify policy and budgetary adjustments to improve the provision and coordination of eye health and vision care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.