

# From There to Here: A story of partnerships in Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Eye Health



AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF  
**OPTOMETRY**  
CLINICAL SERVICES • RESEARCH • EDUCATION

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## 1940

### The Australian College of Optometry

- Our Vision is to achieve world leading eye health outcomes for all
- Our Mission is to improve the eye health and well being of communities through innovation, partnership, and leadership in clinical optometry services, research and education



## Key Partnerships

- VAHS
- VACCHO
- RWAV
- IEH
- RDWA South Australia
- PEHET (BHVI, AHCSA, CFEH, OA)
- DHHS
- VES/VASSS
- Over 20 ACCHO's across Victoria, NSW, TAS and SA

## 1985

### The Victorian Eyecare Service

- Victorian Government funded, state-wide, eyecare and glasses subsidy program for people on pension and concession cards, and Aboriginal people
- Dedicated ACO sites in Carlton, Fitzroy (VAHS), Frankston, Dandenong, Broadmeadows, East Reservoir, and Braybrook
- A network of rural private practices ensures state-wide availability

## 1997

### Outreach

- Provides services to patients in community locations; for people experiencing homelessness; residential aged care facilities; Supported Residential Services; refugee/asylum seeker sites; and care for people with disabilities
- Impact; improved access to eye care for people experiencing disadvantage
- The provision of services to outreach locations across the state further enhances access to VES locations

## 1998

### Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS)

- A conscious step towards acknowledging the specific need for eye care for Aboriginal people
- Since the clinic's establishment, over 8000 eye care services have been provided in a culturally appropriate environment

### Training Aboriginal Eye Health Workers

- A short course in eye health was developed in partnership with VACCHO and the Aboriginal Eye Health Committee, between 1998-2001
- Held at the ACO, and at regional centres in Echuca, Bairnsdale and Warrnambool
- In 2009, the ACO was involved in an accredited course for Aboriginal Eye Health Workers developed by VACCHO and Vision20Australia

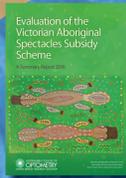
## 2010

### Visiting Optometrist Scheme (VOS)

- A Commonwealth initiative
- Eye care services to ACCHO's across regional Victoria and greater Melbourne, as well as community Aboriginal sites across Melbourne
- ACO continues its involvement through a partnership with RWAV
- New partnership with RDWA in South Australia
- Ongoing ACO involvement is around community need, with sites encouraged to develop relationships with local providers

### The Victorian Aboriginal Spectacle Subsidy Scheme (VASSS)

- Developed in consultation with community, with frames approved by Aboriginal elders
- Resulted in an increase in the uptake of eye examinations and access to visual aids by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people
- Plays a critical role in the affordability of glasses, encourages improved access to eye care



## 2013

### Aboriginal Liaison Officer

- First Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island person employed at the ACO
- Role to strengthen and build the ACO's engagement with community
- Helped with building of trust between the ACO's eye care team and the Aboriginal communities in which the ACO provided services

## Key Involvements

- Vision2020 Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Committee
- Koolin Balit Project
- Regional eye health steering committees across Victoria
- Eye & Ear / VAHS Ophthalmology Service steering committee
- Provision of Eye Health Equipment and Training Project (PEHET)
- Victorian Aboriginal Eye Health Committee - Statewide meeting
- Victorian Vision Initiative steering committee
- Roadmap stakeholder consultation groups
- National Close the Gap Conference (2018/2019)

## 2017

### Provision of Eye Health Equipment and Training (PEHET)

- The ACO is co-lead (with Brien Holden Vision Institute) of a consortium of 5 eye health organisations (including Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia, Centre for Eye Health and Optometry Australia)
- Project Period April 2017 to June 2020
- Goal: Procure and distribute 155 non-mydratric retinal camera's to Aboriginal health services across Australia
- Provide training to embed use of the retinal cameras in the health services
- To support increased primary care access to retinal photography for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people with diabetes

“ The ACO acknowledges the traditional custodians of the country throughout Australia and pay our respects to their culture, and their past and present elders. We also pay respect to Indigenous cultures and Elders from other lands. ”



## Capacity Building

- Development of a Reconciliation Action Plan, inclusive of a cultural awareness strategy for all ACO staff
- Ongoing revision of policy, procedure and patient care, to ensure we provide a culturally safe environment for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island patients
- Liaising with the VES around Aboriginal cultural safety training for rural VES practitioners
- Ongoing development of Aboriginal Services – with culturally responsive framework for existing and new strategies

## 2018

### Formation of the ACO's Reconciliation Action Plan Working Party

- Provides the ACO with guidance and support to further strengthen how we work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities, individuals and stakeholders
- The ACO is committed to being a culturally competent organisation, with employees that are culturally aware, respectful and confident in their practice and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities
- We aim to further strengthen and build cultural awareness and action into the fabric of the ACO through our Innovate RAP

### VAHS, Eye and Ear, ACO partnership

- 20 years after its clinic at VAHS was established, the ACO entered into a partnership with the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital and VAHS to create a comprehensive and integrated eye care service at VAHS
- The aim of this clinic is to provide the right service in a culturally appropriate location, irrespective of the eye health professional required