

Establishing an Ophthalmology Clinic at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS)

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In late 2017, an opportunity was identified to establish an Ophthalmology Outreach Clinic to be run at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS). This service would be provided by clinical staff from the Eye and Ear Hospital. It was anticipated that by providing this service in a culturally safe environment, more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people might attend the clinic to have their eyes examined and conditions treated. Preliminary discussions began in early 2018 to scope out what services could be provided in this clinic. Discussions also focussed on what work would need to be done, and what funding would be required, to bring this to fruition.

A similar model has been successfully running at VAHS for the past six years where Eye and Ear Hospital staff provide outreach services for the Healthy Ears Clinic. The Healthy Ears Clinic Operations Guideline was reviewed in 2018 and many improvements were made to streamline and optimise the operations of the clinic. This provided a solid foundation for which to begin planning for the Ophthalmology Outreach Clinic.

Roll forward to mid November 2018 and the first clinic day was run on 14th November. Whilst this clinic didn't see patients, important set up of equipment and staff training occurred which enabled us to have staff fully prepared and trained, and the equipment correctly set up, ready to see the first patients at the second clinic session on 28th November 2018.

The establishment of this clinic was made possible through strong collaboration with the teams at VAHS and the Australian College of Optometry (ACO). The ACO currently runs an optometry and spectacles scheme service at VAHS. We envisage that patients who require medical treatment will be referred to the Ophthalmology Clinic. Patients will also be referred from VAHS GP clinics and external facilities.