

Integrating Retinal Camera Screening in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs): A leading-practice example

Background

Diabetic retinopathy (DR) is a serious eye problem that can develop in people with diabetes and lead to vision loss and blindness¹. Indigenous Australians are more likely to have vision impairment as a result of DR compared to non-Indigenous Australians and yet only approximately half of the Indigenous population with diabetes will have had an eye check for DR in the last 12 months². Since November 2016, primary health care services, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), have had access to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific MBS item 12325 to provide screening for detecting DR with non-mydratiac retinal photography. In support of this initiative, the Commonwealth Government has also funded the 'Provision of Eye Health Equipment and Training (PEHET)' project (2017 to 2020) to distribute (and train in the use of) approximately 155 non-mydratiac retinal cameras to primary health care services (including ACCHOs) across Australia.

Objective

The purpose of this paper is to:

1. Illustrate a 'leading-practice' example of how the retinal camera can be integrated into the eye care service delivery model in an ACCHO
2. Identify, from the example provided, key elements of the DR screening pathway in an ACCHO setting that has successfully embedded the camera and the MBS item 12325 into practice

Gidgee Healing, Normanton: A leading-practice example

The Gidgee Healing Primary Health Service is an ACCHO in North West Queensland that provides a range of medical and clinical services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Mt Isa and the surrounding region including a clinic at Normanton. Health services are provided by a team of General Practitioners, Indigenous health professionals, nurses, allied health professionals, administration and transport staff. This includes a visiting optometrist, who attends the clinic bi-monthly for a full week each visit.

'Gidgee' Normanton was first funded for a DR camera in 2018 and their staff were trained through PEHET in November 2018. Since then, Gidgee have been active in their use of the camera. They have 222 patients with diabetes on their client list and of those 112 were screened for DR and/or examined by the visiting optometrist between December 2018 and August 2019. When adjusted to a 12-month period, this represents nearly 70 per cent of their patients with diabetes³.

Gidgee are very proud of how they have trained local people to lead the work around the use of the retinal screening camera and how well accepted it has become by the community.

**"If you are waiting for visiting services all the time,
you are missing so much...
This is people's lives we are talking about"**

- Patricia Taylor, Practice Manager, Gidgee, Normanton

¹ Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, Eye Health Key Facts: Diabetic retinopathy among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 2017

² Centre for Eye Research Australia and Vision 2020 Australia, The National Eye Health Survey, 2016

³ Penrose. L and Leon. C. https://www.checkup.org.au/icms_docs/310372_17_Lisa_Penrose-Herbert_and_Cameron_Leon_Gidgee_Healing.pdf



Screening

Since acquiring the camera and undertaking training in its use, Gidgee staff have screened clients who have diabetes through a mix of methods, including:

- Designated clinics: with appointments for clients with diabetes (as a component of their diabetes cycle of care)
- Opportunistic screening: when a client with diabetes attends the clinic
- Word of mouth: since integrating the camera into the service cycle, the community has become familiar with its benefits and have encouraged others to get their eyes checked

**"The AMS needs to be a one stop shop...
While you're here we will check your eyes too!"**

- Patricia Taylor, Practice Manager Gidgee, Normanton

Gidgee also advertises the DR screening program in the clinic, through the local council and through Facebook.

The retinal camera is permanently set up and switched on each day in its own room.

The retinal photos are taken by two of the trained Aboriginal Health Workers (AHW). Photos are saved to a USB and then uploaded to the client files (Gidgee uses Best Practice clinical software). The AHWs also measure visual acuity (VA).

The employment of the North West Queensland Indigenous Eye Health Coordinator through Gidgee Healing is a key initiative to the continuing support of this activity.



"Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will receive an eye health check with the use of the Retinal Camera that we have in our clinic"

**- Josephine Bond,
Senior Aboriginal Health Worker,
Gidgee, Normanton**

Assessment of the photos

Once the retinal photo has been taken by the AHW, it is assessed by the General Practitioner (GP) in the clinic to see if the patient needs to be referred to the optometrist or ophthalmologist or can be managed by the clinic.

The GP has undertaken the free online grading courses:

www.drgrading.iehu.unimelb.edu.au (Online Self-Directed Diabetic Retinopathy Grading Course)

www.learningforvision.com.au (Diabetic Retinopathy Assessment: A training course for GPs)

If the GP is not available, the clinic practice manager (who is also an Enrolled Nurse) can also assess the photo. She has also undertaken the online grading course.



Referral

Once the client has been screened and the photo assessed there are four possible paths:

1. For those with no sign of DR, the photo is filed electronically in the patient management system and a recall for a future check is set up for one year.
2. For those with signs of mild DR, or if the photo is ungradable, the client is referred to the visiting optometrist for further assessment. The appointment is made at reception on the day of the screening and transport is booked to support the client in getting to the clinic for the optometrist appointment.
3. For more severe signs of retinopathy, the client is referred to the regional ophthalmology service in Mt Isa and an appointment is made. Gidgee supports the client by assisting with lodging a (Queensland Health) patient travel form and providing transport to and from the plane for their flights into Mt Isa and to the hospital for their appointment. Normanton is around 500 km from Mt Isa and the clinic is currently advocating for a visiting service.
4. Clients with visual acuity issues and presenting with other eye and visual complaints are referred to the visiting optometrist.

Claiming MBS Item 12325

A key part of embedding the retinal camera into the health service activity of Gidgee has been to ensure the service is now claiming the MBS item 12325 benefit (signed off by the GP) for eligible patients. Since the initial training in November 2018, and then the development of systems to embed the eye screening into practice, the clinic has made 52 claims against MBS item 12325. After the initial period of adjustment, all eligible screenings are now being claimed against the item number.

MBS item 12325 is for clients who:

- Identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Have diabetes
- Have not claimed MBS item 12325 (or MBS item 12326) in the last 12 months
- Do not have previously diagnosed DR
- Do not have VA worse than 6/12 in either eye OR a difference of more than 2 lines on the vision chart between the 2 eyes

Check www.mbsonline.gov.au for full details

What can be learnt?

The key elements of the DR screening program as implemented by Gidgee Healing in Normanton are represented in the diagram over the page.

Future challenges and goals for the service include:

- Improving access to ophthalmology as close to home as possible
- Ensuring that the training and support related to the use of the retinal camera is ongoing and sustainable
- Integrating the uploading of DR images taken on the camera straight into Best Practice clinical software

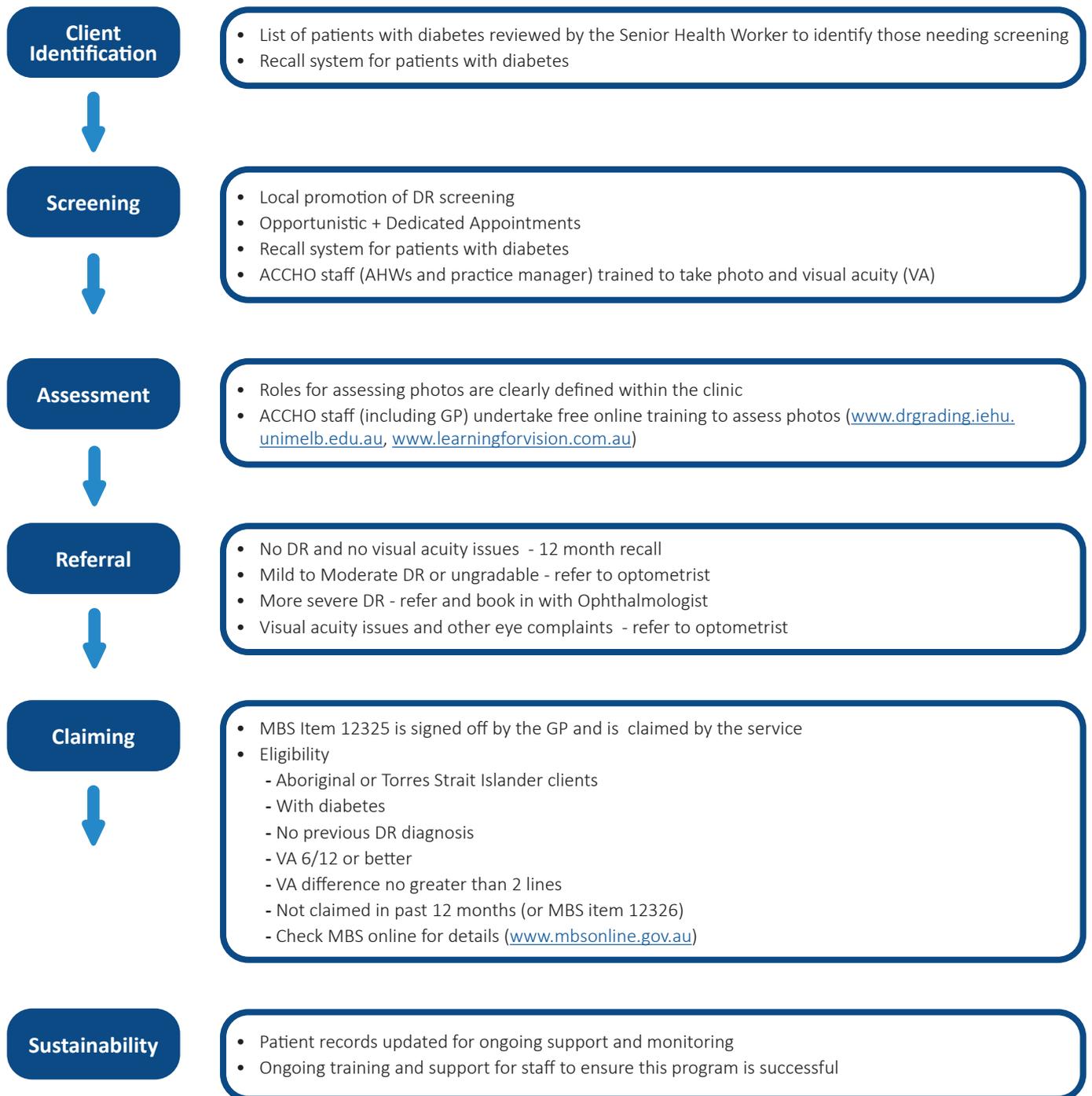


"My role in the clinic involves screening patients, wound care management and using the Retinal Camera"

**- Gareth Casey, Aboriginal Trainee Health Worker
Gidgee, Normanton**



Diagram A: Key Elements of the Gidgee Normanton DR Screening Program



Gidgee
Healing

www.gidgeehealing.com



CHECK TODAY,
SEE TOMORROW

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