

Welcome to the December 2020 edition of the [Indigenous Eye Health](#) (IEH) Newsletter.

Update from Professor Hugh Taylor - Director of Indigenous Eye Health

What a different year 2020 has turned out to be! The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on our work and the work of the sector. With the lockdown, we have been working from home since March, although we meet regularly via Zoom. Our ability to travel has been severely impacted, but we have been able to continue a lot of work with people in regions and health services across the country via video and teleconference. Face-to-face meetings and the initiating of new programs has been severely curtailed, and of course, many regular eye exams and elective surgery has been put on hold and will have to be caught up as restrictions are lifted. Equally, the trachoma work was delayed for many months with travel restrictions and the closure of many communities. We had high hopes for 2020- the year to Close the Gap for Vision and to eliminate trachoma. These goals have been pushed back a year or so, depending on how things look in the new 'COVID normal' world.

Having said this, I do want to say what a fabulous job our staff have done. The commitment, work ethic and enthusiasm has not diminished as everyone rose to the challenges and has continued to do a great job as can be seen in the reports in this newsletter. I take my hat off to them.

Professor Hugh Taylor, Director of Indigenous Eye Health



IEH staff meeting virtually in 2020.

Global Blindness Study Reveals Targets 'Not Being Met'

A new global study has found no significant reduction in the number of people with treatable sight loss since 2010. Published in *The Lancet Global Health*, it examined all population-based surveys of eye disease worldwide since 1980 and found public health services across the world are failing to meet targets to reduce avoidable sight loss.

A second report, also published by the same group in *Lancet Global Health*, warns that global blindness and severe vision impairment is set to dramatically increase by 2050. Professor Hugh Taylor, who is a senior author on both papers, said it was wonderful to see all the data combined to give such a strong picture of worldwide progress in eye care and the work that still needs to be done. "It shows that we do know how to address the needs, when the services are provided, they really do work, but more are needed."

[Read more on the IEH website](#)

2020 Roadmap Annual Update Launched

On Friday 20 November 2020, we released the 2020 Annual Update on the Implementation of the Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision. Professor Ian Anderson AO officially launched the Update, alongside Professor Hugh Taylor AC, at an online event.

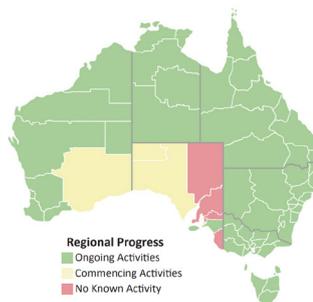
[View the recording of the launch here](#)



Professor Hugh Taylor and Professor Ian Anderson during the Annual Update online launch, November 2020.

The Update shows that although more than half (57 per cent) of the recommendations have been fully implemented, and 116 of 138 intermediary steps taken, Australia has missed its 2020 target

Coordination of regional eye services now occurs in 59 (92 per cent) of the 64 regions across Australia. These include more than 95 per cent of the Indigenous population.



[Read more and view the annual update on the IEH website](#)

For the launch we also had the opportunity to interview a number of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues about the year 2020 and the impact of COVID-19 on eye health in their communities.

[View the video here - this video is worth watching!](#)



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues speaking about 2020 and the impact of COVID-19.

2021 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference

The 2021 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference (NATSIEHC) will be held virtually from 20 – 22 April 2021.

The conference, previously known as the 'Close the Gap for Vision by 2020 National Conference', is being designed for virtual attendance and the online conference platform will support a range of exchange and interaction opportunities including supporting online social and cultural exchanges.

The 2021 conference will include speakers who were to present their work at the 'Close the Gap for Vision National Conference 2020', originally scheduled for March 2020 in Adelaide, and other postponed elements from the 2020 conference, together with new speakers and other additions.

We are also pleased to announce that abstract submissions are open.

We welcome abstracts from all working in or interested in improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health. Topics should be relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and efforts to close the gap for vision and ultimately eliminate avoidable vision loss and blindness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia.

Closing date for abstract submission is Monday 18 January 2021. We particularly welcome and encourage submissions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and presenters.

[To submit an abstract and to view more information about the abstract submission process, please visit the conference section of the IEH website](#)

Please also watch out for the conference registrations which will be open soon.



AIHW launch 2020 Indigenous Eye Health Measures Report

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) released the 'Indigenous eye health measures 2020' on 5 November 2020. This is the fourth annual report on the Indigenous eye health measures.

These measures were developed to provide an evidence base to monitor changes in eye health among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over time.



The 2020 report updates the evidence base, notes changes in Indigenous eye health over the past year and includes measures of access to and use of eye health services and allows identification of gaps in service delivery.

[Read more on the IEH website](#)

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Regional Implementation

Roadmap Regional Implementation Update

Regional implementation of the Roadmap activities for the second half of 2020 have continued with the team in Melbourne locked down during much of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our zoom meeting schedules have been relentless. Jurisdictional stakeholder groups have continued to meet virtually through the year and regional stakeholder groups have largely maintained meeting schedules and moved discussions from reporting COVID impacts and challenges to now setting some plans for 2021.

We have observed in admiration how organisations have responded to COVID-19 and the community-controlled sector's strength and clarity in managing the challenges has been wonderful. Eye care has largely and understandably taken a lower priority and there appear some issues in managing back logs and increased waiting times that will require careful management in 2021.

The Wheatbelt region of WA was the first regional stakeholder group to be assembled and meet virtually (with no face-to-face meetings) and at the end of 2020 we observe 59 established regions with Roadmap activities and estimate that another five new regions will cover the entire land mass of Australia.

We encourage all regional groups to come together and review their eye care needs and situation for end of 2020, so as to make 2021 a year of great eye care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Roadmap Regional Implementation Evaluation Update

Co-design workshop

The second evaluation codesign workshop was held on 8 December via Zoom. 33 people participated in the workshop, representing different parts of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eyecare pathway and contributing their expertise and views to the evaluation process.

The workshop was again facilitated by Kate Kelleher, with sessions led by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group, IEH and the two evaluation teams from ARTD Consultants and Clear Horizon. Breakout sessions provided the opportunity for participants to provide input in smaller groups. Feedback from participants will be included in the next steps with the evaluation.

[A one page summary of the evaluation methods and progress is available here](#)

Please keep your eye out for the launch of the national regional implementation evaluation survey for the Roadmap. We expect this to be launched in early 2021 and encourage all stakeholders and interested folk to participate in the survey.

Regional 'case study' sites

Two regional case studies have already commenced and a second round seeking EOIs for regional groups or networks to participate is now open. This will involve focus groups and interviews between February and April 2021.

The regional case studies allow regional groups to contribute to understanding the national picture and different approaches for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health.

If your regional group is interested in sharing what you have learnt about what works and/or the challenges with taking a regional approach to improving eye care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, please contact Tessa.Saunders@unimelb.edu.au for further detail.

[EOI documentation is available on our website and will be promoted through networks and social media](#)

TRACHOMA

Update about the Trachoma Elimination Program

IEH has continued to make the most of the increased focus on good hygiene that COVID-19 has opened up. The opportunities to work with many partners and to share and promote 'Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs' resources and community service announcements has been positive.

[You can view our COVID-19 health promotion resources here](#)

IEH prepared a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs inquiry into food pricing and remote stores focused on the availability and pricing of hygiene and cleaning products. IEH also gave evidence to the Committee via video conference.

[View our submission here](#)

IEH also developed an animation with ICTV based on the SAFE bathroom checklist featuring Milpa to encourage people to report any issues with their health hardware to their local housing authority. These 'SAFE Bathroom Checklists' are being used extensively in WA which is great and we are keen to see these used more widely. Clinical referrals to reinforce the link between the importance of health hardware in houses to prevent childhood infections including trachoma is another tool which we would like to see used more widely outside of WA.

The generosity of Rotary Australia and Soap Aid have been invaluable in 2020. There have been donations of towels, soap, hygiene products, mirrors and other products to support hygiene efforts.

In Darwin in September there was the launch of the MK2 Rotary & Katherine West Health Board (KWHB) 1,000L Interactive Water Trailer with games, lights, music and light water sprays. The trailer will be used for trachoma and hygiene health promotion in the KWHB region.

IEH is keen to see the ongoing provision of soap in schools and early learning settings and the continued efforts to reinforce the importance of good hygiene (clean faces and hands) for good health for all ages especially for young children and families.

New Milpa 'SAFE Bathroom Checklist' TV Ad Launched

A new TV ad has been developed to promote the use of the Milpa 'SAFE Bathroom Checklist'. The Checklist is a tool that allows community members to report issues in their bathrooms (such as broken taps) to their local housing authority.

To complete the Checklist, community members simply need to 'tick' the things that are working, 'cross' the things that aren't working and 'circle' the things they don't have – using the image on Checklist.

The new TV ad is an animation and features popular health promotion character, Milpa the Trachoma Goanna.

[View the new TV ad here](#)



Community Engagement

Many remote communities have been closed during the COVID-19 pandemic and now the trachoma community engagement team are enjoying getting back out there and talking to community about trachoma. Most recently, the team visited Amoonguna (21km out of Alice Springs).

The trip included a visit to the local school to talk with students about 'Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs' and why clean faces are important to prevent trachoma.



Lesley and Walter at the Alice Springs NAIDOC community day.

In NAIDOC Week this year the team had a stall at the 'Deadly Cup Carnival' – a Rugby League carnival held in Darwin with a strong focus on health and wellbeing. The event had a huge turnout, and it was great to engage with so many community members and talk about trachoma and eye health.

In October, the team headed out to Ampilatwatja. They held trachoma education sessions with the local Healthy Kids Club, talked about 'Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs' with Mums and Bubs at the local 'Families as First Teachers (FaFT)' and talked with community members about the SAFE bathroom checklist and how to use it.

Since June, the team have also visited Santa Teresa, Areyonga, Mt Liebig, Laramba and Utopia.

Thank you to all of the communities we have visited for having us and for their contributions to the efforts to eliminate trachoma.



Lesley running education sessions in Ampilatwatja.

New Trachoma TV Ad Launched in WA

Based on 'Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs', a new TV ad has been developed in Western Australia which highlights the importance of personal hygiene practices to keep ourselves healthy.

Stemming from the need to keep faces clean to prevent trachoma, the additional hygiene steps help combat other illness such as rheumatic heart disease, otitis media and a range of skin infections.

Congratulations to the Public Health Advocacy Institute of Western Australia and all those involved on the development of this exciting new TV ad.

[View the TV Ad here](#)

[You can view our 'Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs' suite of resources on the IEH website](#)



Diabetes Eye Care

'Check Today, See Tomorrow' celebrates 5 years of promoting diabetes eye care awareness

This year marks 5 years since the launch of 'Check Today, See Tomorrow' – national, culturally responsive resources that were developed for community, by community to promote diabetes eye care, and the importance of yearly eye checks to prevent vision loss and blindness.

Since its launch, over 900 resource kits have been ordered in every state and territory across Australia, with over 30% of these orders received from Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations. The supporting multimedia has generated over 20,000 views, and the resources and key messages have been shared on local radio, social media, at community events and integrated into a number of diabetes and eye health programs to support local awareness.

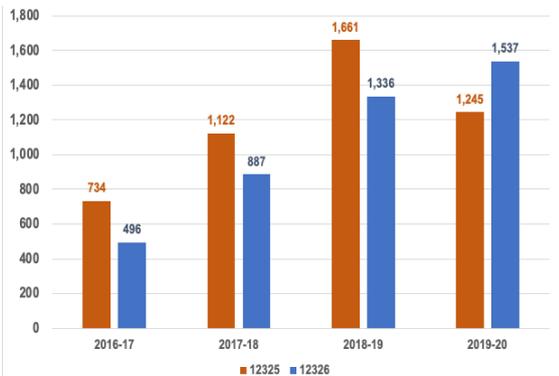
In addition, there has been number of creative adaptations of the resources. This has been very important in acknowledging the cultural and regional diversity of communities.

'Check Today, See Tomorrow' continues to be one of the most recognised diabetes eye care health promotion resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and now more than ever, they will be important to support community confidence and awareness.

MBS Item 12325 Update

The latest MBS 12325 and 12326 data, to October 2020, provides four years annual comparison for billing to support retinal photography for the screening of diabetic retinopathy. Item 12325 is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and Item 12326 for other Australians.

There is a known difference between camera use and MBS claimed camera use in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, where camera use is higher than MBS claimed camera use. The data shows steady growth in the use of the items except for the 2019-2020 period where billing has declined presumably due to reduced services during the COVID-19 pandemic. MBS 12325 has declined by 25% and 12326 has reduced growth in usage.



MBS 12325/ 12326 Annual Claims (November - October). Source: Australian Government Department of Human Services, Medicare Australia Statistics.

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'Share Your Story' Initiative

The 'Share Your Story' initiative aims to share good news stories from the Indigenous eye health sector- as well as showcase existing and emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders who work in the sector. Over the past 12 months, we have published 18 stories from the initiative.

We strongly encourage all readers to consider submitting a story for the 'Share Your Story' initiative.

[For more information and to submit a story, visit the IEH website](#)



SUCCESS STORIES

Emma Dargin, Elizabeth Barrett, Jane Hager, Dian Rahardjo and Colina Waddell all contributed to this instalment of 'Share Your Story: Success Story'.

Emma Dargin an Aboriginal Health Practitioner (AHP), at Condobolin's Aboriginal Health Service helped to save the sight of a patient with diabetic eye disease using her skills in retinal photography triaging and primary care eye health, during recent COVID-19 restrictions.



Condobolin Aboriginal Health Service (AHS) is 460 km (6.5 hours drive) northwest of Sydney in outer regional New South Wales. Condobolin has a population of approximately 3,500 people, with about 770 residents identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. COVID-19 restrictions resulted in a period of two months without optometry outreach clinics at most regional and remote NSW ACCHSs - including Condobolin AHS.

A new patient, with Type 2 diabetes, presented to Condobolin AHS in April 2020. The patient had a history of uncontrolled blood sugar levels over the eight years since the diagnosis of diabetes and had not had an eye examination in five years. The patient complained about seeing black lines with both eyes. Emma took photos of the back of the patient's eye using a digital retinal camera.

[View this Share Your Story here](#)



Tania McLeod was interviewed by IEH staff member Nick Wilson for this instalment of 'Share Your Story: Personal Reflections'.

Tania, thanks so much for taking the time to talk with me today. Would you mind telling us a little bit about yourself? Where are you from? Where's home?



Of course, I love sharing this sort of thing. I was born and bred in Darwin. My mother was born in Darwin, and her father was born in Darwin, and his mother was born in Katherine - so we are from the Jawoyn peoples.

My great grandmother was brought up to Darwin from Eisey Station, she worked as a house girl for various families in Darwin before she married and had my grandfather. So, we have a long and very rich history here in Darwin and I'm very lucky to have been brought up in a very multicultural place. I also have Torres Strait Islander heritage running through me, which is from my grandmother, my mum's mum. And then there's my father's side, the Scottish side. They came to Darwin in the 60s. So born and raised on Larrakia country - in my little bubble of love, protection and security.

[View this Share Your Story here](#)

Staffing update

IEH welcomes Walter Bathern to the team as our new Trachoma Engagement Officer. Walter is our new trachoma community engagement officer. Walter is an Aboriginal man and is based in our Alice Springs office. We would also like to welcome back Carol Wynne. Carol has returned to work on a part time basis after maternity leave.

We farewell Rosamond Gilden. Rosamond joined IEH in 2016 and has been working predominately on our Roadmap regional implementation work. We would like to thank Rosamond for her contributions to our work and wish her the very best in her new role at SAHMRI in South Australia.

We also wish Karl Hampton farewell. Karl joined IEH earlier this year and has been working as a Senior Engagement Officer in the trachoma team. We would like to wish Karl all the best in his new role and thank him for his contributions to our work.

Thank you

IEH would like to thank our funders and donors who contribute to making our work possible.

We would like to thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, our partners, stakeholders and Advisory Board for contributing to and supporting this important work.