

Welcome to the June 2021 edition of the Indigenous Eye Health (IEH) Newsletter

### Update from Professor Hugh Taylor - Director of Indigenous Eye Health

Through the pandemic I have been surprised and very pleased at how well our staff has been able to work and the progress we have been able to make despite the lockdowns. For several years we have had several staff based in Alice Springs for trachoma health promotion and they have continued to do a great job. At the end of last year we decided to have some staff located interstate to facilitate more face to face contact and provide flexibility in further lockdowns. Fortunately, this fitted in very well with the plans of the staff concerned. Also with the good experience of Zoom meetings we knew we could work well together remotely. We now have two staff based in South Australia and one in Darwin as well as our two staff in Alice Springs.

The sector is still waiting for the Commonwealth to release the plans to “end avoidable blindness by 2025” for Indigenous Australians. This commitment was made in 2019 and completes the work of the “Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision” and the follow up plan developed by Vision 2020 Australia, “Strong Eyes, Strong Communities”. This implementation plan is urgently needed so that activities and funding for this next stage can proceed. We are most grateful that the Commonwealth has extended the trachoma funding to the jurisdictions and for the health promotion we support.

As mentioned below we held a most successful virtual National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference in April. I want to congratulate and thank all those who contributed to its success including the Program Advisory Group and our staff.

In May 2021 we welcomed the announcement in the Federal Budget of \$19.1 million to continue to improve Australia’s trachoma elimination program, supporting the updated elimination goal of 2022.

I also want to thank and pay tribute to our very generous and consistent donors and funders who continue to support our work. We could not do it without them. I do want to particularly thank and congratulate Ann Miller AM whose contributions to the community were recognised in the Queen’s Birthday Honours.



### 2021 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference The Gap & Beyond

#### The 2021 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference

The 2021 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference: The Gap and Beyond was the fifth annual gathering of the sector, drawing delegates who work in First Nations eye health from across Australia for three days dedicated to learning, information sharing, and sector-wide conversations.

The 2021 Conference, held online from 20-22 April 2021, drew 237 registered delegates, with 60 presentations, including 4 keynote speeches, 2 plenary sessions with 10 presentations and a panel discussion, 8 workshops, 12 table-top presentations, 3 concurrent sessions which included altogether 9 presentations, 7 posters displayed on the platform throughout the conference, an opening and closing session, one campfire session with 8 discussion groups, and a special online social event and awards ceremony.

The Conference delegates, representing every State and Territory, connected through the different sessions and had opportunities to engage throughout the program, supported by the conference platform.

Feedback from conference delegates was very positive, and emphasised in the post-conference evaluation the value of the conference as a gathering point for the sector, to exchange information and collectively reflect.

IEH thanks all delegates for participating in the event, all speakers and presenters, the Program Advisory Group and co-hosts AHCSA. Congratulations also to the awards winners. We look forward to the next conference and are hoping for an in-person event while still supporting remote access.

Please watch the IEH website as we will soon be posting access to video recordings of the key note speakers and a conference report.

Details about the 2020 and 2021 award winners can be found [here](#)

#### 2021 award recipients:

**Dr Kristopher Rallah-Baker for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership**

**Kerry Woods for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contributions – Individual**

**Victorian Aboriginal Health Service Eye Clinic for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contributions – Organisation**

On 21 April at the 2021 National Conference, a number of sector awards were presented to individuals and organisations for their contributions in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health. The award ceremony started with the presentation of the 2020 Leaky Pipe Awards which were not presented last year as the conference was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We congratulate the following 2020 award recipients:

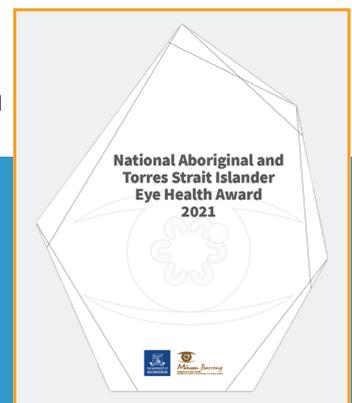
**NSW/ACT Advisory Group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health for Regional Collaboration**

**Cathy Starr for Service Delivery**

**Maree O’Hara for Unsung Hero**

**Karadi Aboriginal Corporation for Community Engagement**

**Trevor Buzzacott for Community Leadership**





## Impact of COVID-19 on service delivery

COVID-19 had an impact throughout the health system, and on access to health services during the pandemic. Publicly available treatment data emerging from 2020 and 2021 shows that access to screening and treatment has been impacted, although in differing ways.

Over the first 12 months of COVID-19 impact (March 2020 to February 2021), cataract surgery numbers in private (with an MBS rebate) for the whole of Australia (not Indigenous-specific) were about 92.6% of the number in the previous 12 months, or almost 10% under the total expected (considering average annual growth of about 2.3%). Some jurisdictions were impacted more than others, with Victoria having over 25% lower number than expected for the year (COVID impact was more significant in Victoria, with longer lockdown periods). Intravitreal injections for the 12 months, which are used to treat diabetic retinopathy along with a number of other retinal and macular conditions, increased during the 12 months by over 7% (just 5% short of the expected annual growth).

MBS items for screening show a more significant drop. MBS 12325 item, for the annual retinal screening for Indigenous patients with diabetes, dropped by over 27% across Australia, with the worst-hit jurisdiction, Victoria, recording less than half the number of claims compared with the previous 12 months. MBS 715 annual health checks dropped by about 15% in the period, though the average annual growth was 10% for the previous 5 years. Unlike treatment, screenings activity was still lower than pre-COVID levels across most jurisdictions in the first quarter of 2021.

While data is still emerging from the COVID year to paint a more complete picture, analysis of emerging data suggest a deeper, and more lingering impact on screening compared to treatment items. This may mean that patients may eventually present later for treatment, thus increasing the chances of impact on vision. A challenge for the sector now is to support recovery of screening and examination rates and ensure that pathways to treatment are in place and working well.

## Regions and jurisdictions update

The first six months on 2021 has seen continued progress in the work of regional stakeholder groups to implement the Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision, and the establishment of some new collaboratives.

Of the 64 identified regions covering the whole of Australia, 63 are currently considered 'active' collaborations. The Roadmap implementation map is nearly all green! Work being undertaken in South Australia has been key, and supported by IEH staff relocation, to move this figure from 59 active regions in the 2020 annual update report.

SA also established its statewide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health committee in 2021 with the strong support and leadership of AHCSA. Regional stakeholder groups continue to provide support and enabled reactivation of eye care after COVID impacted 2020.

## We are looking for a researcher

IEH have recently advertised for an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander researcher. The broad goal with this new appointment, funded initially for two years, is to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health.

People interested in this opportunity should contact Mitchell Anjou via email [manjou@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:manjou@unimelb.edu.au) or call 0433 673 452 for more information.

## Roadmap regional implementation evaluation update

### Progress on data collection

Good progress is being made on the evaluation, with data now collected via 8 case study sites, the national survey, interviews with multiple stakeholders and various data sources for the desktop review. Thank you to all those across the country who have completed surveys and participated in interviews and focus groups. Final reports are due in late July (see below under the co-design up-date for next steps).

There were 20 prize-winners following completion of the survey and 'Check Today, See Tomorrow' T-shirts and Deadly Eyewear sunnies have been sent out across the country. Check out two of the winners in their gear.



Prize winners Heather Wilson (NT) and Libby Lesock (VIC)

### Co-design workshop

We held the third co-design workshop for the evaluation on 25 May, where initial analysis of data for the evaluation was discussed. Draft evaluation reports will be shared with co-design group members and interviewees/focus group members before the reports are finalised in late July. A final co-design workshop, focused on recommendations, implementation and knowledge translation will be held later in the year.

As well as our own staff, representatives from ACCHOs, jurisdictional affiliates, fundholders, hospitals and optometry participated in the workshop, which gives us a good breadth of cover across the sector. Thank you to all members of the co-design group for your ongoing participation and to Kate Kelleher for facilitating the workshop.

### 2021 NATSIEHC evaluation workshop

Tania McLeod, Nicole Tujague, Anne-Marie Banfield and Shaun Tatipata, members of the evaluation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group, shared their insights and learning from the journey so far in an evaluation workshop at the April national conference. Researchers from ARTD Consultants and Clear Horizon also contributed to the workshop. It was great to hear the perspectives of both First Nation and non-Indigenous evaluators.

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group

A big thanks goes to the eight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group (ATSIRG) members, including co-chairs Anne-Marie Banfield and Shaun Tatipata, who continue to provide valuable and ongoing guidance for the project. The ATSIRG had the opportunity to comment on the findings emerging from the evaluation's data collection activities and helped to shape the co-design workshop delivered at the end of May. ATSIRG members have also been actively exploring opportunities to expand the group's scope to beyond the evaluation and serve as a resource for the wider eye health and vision care sector. Please contact Shaun Tatipata for further discussion.



(L-R) Nicole Tujague (QLD), Anne-Marie Banfield (VIC), Tania McLeod and Shaun Tatipata (NT)

## Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs app launch

The Indigenous Eye Health trachoma team recently held two launches for the new 'Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs' augmented-reality app. The app is an interactive, engaging, and immersive resource that helps promote good hygiene practices and Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs. You can read more about the app [here](#).

The first launch was held at the Yipirinya Primary School in Alice Springs on Wednesday 2 June 2021 at a family day event. The event was well attended with around 70 students, teachers and family members present on the day.

(L) MP Bill Yan and Milpa the trachoma goanna at the launch at Yipirinya School



(R) Lesley Martin, Rhonda Inkamala and Walter Bathern

Rhonda Inkamala, a language and cultural educator at the Yipirinya School, opened the event with a Welcome to Country. Attendees were treated to a performance by students who sang several songs with the music teacher Ed.

Lesley Martin and Walter Bathern, Community Engagement Officers with the trachoma team, spoke about Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs, why it's important to practice good hygiene and spoke about the new augmented-reality app. Milpa the trachoma goanna made an appearance, too. We would like to acknowledge and thank MP Bill Yan for officially launching the 'Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs' app.

After this, students were able to explore the six steps even further by visiting one of the six stations set-up at the school, each focusing on one of the six steps.



At each station, students and families were provided with colouring in sheets and pencils to use with the new app. After completing each of the stations, students also received an awesome hygiene gift pack donated by Rotary Tumut.

Milpa the trachoma goanna at the launch of his new app at Yipirinya School!

Thank you to Tilly and Frances from Central Australia Health Service, Jason Egan from Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC), Deb Martin and Healthy Harold (Life Education NT) and the senior students for their help running the six step stations on the day. A big thank you to Principal Fiona McLoughlin and the Yipirinya Primary School staff for their help and for inviting us along to launch the app.

### Ntaria school launch

The second app launch was held at Ntaria Families as First Teachers (FaFT) on Tuesday 8 June 2021, with around 50 young people, students, and family members in attendance. Attendees were treated to a visit from Milpa the trachoma goanna and his good mate Healthy Harold from Life Education NT.

A student at Ntaria School tests out the new 'Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs' augmented-reality app



The school had stations set-up for each of the six steps where students could learn more about each of the six steps to stop germs. There was also a special table set-up for students to test out the new app.



Teachers, students and parents try out the new app in Ntaria.

Thank you to students, teachers, staff and families from the Ntaria FaFT and School – in particular Gowree Nagatharan. Thank you also to Deb Martin and Healthy Harold from Life Education NT, Nick Bewg from Department of Education, Jason, Emma & Montana from CAAC, NT Health, Lukura Congress, CAAFLU, NASCA and ICTV.

We also want to take this opportunity to thank Peter Lawson from Tangentyere Council and the Drum Atweme group for being fantastic ambassadors for Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs and for featuring heavily in many of our six step resources. To try the app, check out the [IEH website](#) for more information and download instructions – it's lots of fun!

### Santa Teresa oval launch event

The IEH trachoma team attended the launch of the new, grassed oval at Santa Teresa on Thursday 3 June 2021. The team ran a hygiene station and gave out around 50 Milpa hygiene bags which contained a range 'Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs' resources, hygiene products like soap, colouring in sheets and pencils to use with the new trachoma app, wristbands, temporary tattoos and other fun stuff that promote good hygiene practices. The trachoma team set-up next to the face painting stall, which provided a great opportunity for the kids to have a look in the mirror and clean their face if they needed to before having their faces painted.



Milpa the trachoma goanna was a hit in Santa Teresa

Unfortunately Melbourne Football Club were unable to attend the event due to lockdown in Melbourne but have worked closely with the Santa Teresa over several years on the [grassing of the oval project](#). It was a fantastic day and the trachoma team had a great time helping the community celebrate their new oval. Thank you to the Atyenhenge Atherre Aboriginal Corporation (AAAC) and the Santa Teresa community for inviting us to attend the event.

### WA Trachoma Storybook launch in Geraldton, WA

Nick Wilson from the trachoma team attended the launch of the Western Australian (WA) Trachoma Storybook in Geraldton, WA on 16 June 2021. The Storybook is a collection of stories that highlight some of the excellent work happening in communities across WA in the prevention of trachoma. The stories are all written using a strengths-based approach and celebrate the cultures of WA Indigenous people and communities.

In 2019, the trachoma team worked with the Papulankutja community to develop a mural that featured local dreaming stories and messaging about the importance of facial cleanliness to prevent trachoma. This project is one of the stories featured in the Storybook.

Congratulations to all of the communities and organisations featured in the Storybook. Thank you to Mel and Scott from the #EndingTrachoma project and the Public Health Advocacy Institute of WA (PHAIWA) for inviting us and for all their hard work in putting this great publication together. We hope it's the first of many to come!

You can watch a video about the project [here](#) and see Milpa celebrating with Papulankutja community [here](#)

Read the story published in the Geraldton Guardian [here](#)





# Diabetes Eye Care

## Review of the 'Check Today, See Tomorrow' diabetes eye care resources

Since the launch of the ['Check Today, See Tomorrow' diabetes eye care resources](#) at the end of 2015, over 950 resource kits have been ordered in every state and territory across Australia, with over 30% of orders received from Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations. The [supporting multimedia](#) has generated over 20,000 views, and a number of [creative adaptations](#) with local messages developed. This has been very important in acknowledging and responding to the incredible cultural and regional diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

IEH is currently undertaking a review of the diabetes eye care resources. Explore the full range of print and multimedia resources [here](#).

Please get in touch with [carol.wynne@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:carol.wynne@unimelb.edu.au) if you are interested in sharing your feedback and any suggestions.



(R) Meg Torpey, Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service with 'Check Today, See Tomorrow' flipchart.

If you are not familiar with the 'Check Today, See Tomorrow' diabetes eye care resources, you can view this [short video](#) to learn how they were developed.

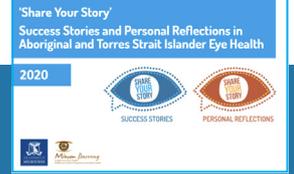


SUCCESS STORIES

## 'Share you Story' compilation released on Close the Gap Day 2021

IEH released a compilation of the current stories and personal reflections from the ['Share your Story'](#) initiative on National Close the Gap Day 2021 to showcase the progress, achievements, leadership and shared commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health.

We acknowledge and wholeheartedly thank the many contributors who generously provided their success stories and personal reflections in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health.



If you, your organisation, regional eye stakeholder group or another collaboration are interested in sharing your story in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health, visit the [IEH website](#) or email us at [Indigenous-EyeHealth@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:Indigenous-EyeHealth@unimelb.edu.au) for more information.



## IEH participating in Deadly Cup NAIDOC Week Rugby League Carnival

IEH is proud to be participating in the [Deadly Cup](#), a NAIDOC Week Rugby League Carnival to be held in Darwin on Sunday 4 July. This community health promotion event provides a great opportunity to celebrate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and community in the Top End whilst connecting with our colleagues to promote eye care awareness.

Our community engagement team will be participating in several activities promoting ['Check Today, See Tomorrow'](#) diabetes eye care and ['Clean Faces, Strong Eyes'](#) trachoma health promotion messages.



This is set to be an incredible day, so if you're in the Darwin and Palmerston region, don't miss out (and make sure you come and say hello!)

## 'Ask the Question' (AtQ) resources available to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status

In 2019, IEH developed [AtQ resources](#)\* (with input from a number of key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander informants) to help support eye care service providers and regional eye stakeholder groups working to improve the identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status in the delivery of eye care services in mainstream practices and clinics.



(L) AtQ 'toblerone' desktop resource

The uptake of the AtQ resources has been very positive with over 5000 distributed across Australia. The resources are free to order and further information can be found on the [IEH website](#).

\*The existing wording and artwork from the 'Have you Asked the Question?' Joint project by North East Healthy Communities and Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) was used with permission. Project artwork by Gary Saunders.

## New editable PowerPoint templates to promote community messages on diabetes eye care

The ['Check Today, See Tomorrow'](#) resources were designed to enable local adaptations by communities to support local messaging and ownership.

We have created editable [PowerPoint templates](#) for organisations and communities to create their own social media posts and posters with locally appropriate messages and imagery.

Examples of how community have created their own posters and messages can be found [here](#). For further support please contact [Indigenous-EyeHealth@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:Indigenous-EyeHealth@unimelb.edu.au)



(R) David Atkinson with his adapted poster from Shepparton, Victoria

## Appointment of Shaun Tatipata

IEH were delighted to welcome Shaun Tatipata to the team in January 2021. Shaun is well known in the eye health and Aboriginal health sectors (from his work most recently for the Fred Hollows Foundation) and his appointment is an academic specialist to contribute to the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health.

## Changes in IEH staffing

Among the new challenges and opportunities afforded by COVID is that IEH now has staff across four cities (and two or three time zones) and three jurisdictions and is now embracing new multistate, hybrid working arrangements across the group. Darwin, Alice Springs, Adelaide and Melbourne are currently home bases for IEH staff.

## Thank you

IEH would like to thank our funders and donors who all contribute to making our work possible. We would like to thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, our partners, stakeholder and advisory board for contributing to and supporting this important work.

