

Media Release



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Close the Gap for Vision shows improved eye services for Indigenous but also lingering inequity

Significant progress has been made to improve eye care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but service shortfalls and equity gaps remain, according to the 10th annual update on the Implementation of the Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision.

As a result of the work to Close the Gap, 64 regional stakeholder groups and seven groups at jurisdictional level have been established. Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and other Indigenous-controlled organisations are also leading eye care activities at regional and state levels.

Eye examinations have increased from 81,713 in 2013 to 2014 to 104,300 in 2019 to 2020 with steady increase in the number of cataract surgeries.

But while cataract services and eye checks for diabetes have improved, there is still inequity with longer cataract surgery waiting lists for Aboriginal people than non-Aboriginal people, with waits of up to 50 per cent longer. Diabetes eye checks show significant jurisdictional variation and are still well below non-Aboriginal people and under target rates.

The biggest success has been with the trachoma (contagious bacterial infection of the eye) program for children with the annual report showing 54 hot spots (prevalence of active trachoma of 20 per cent or more in children aged 1-9 years) in 2008, and 16 in 2020, and 205 communities with or at risk in 2008 and just 65 in 2020.

"I am very pleased to report the significant progress that has been made in implementing the Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision over the past year and over the previous 10 years. The 2021 report highlights the hard work of the community and eye care sectors across Australia to implement change and to work together to improve eye health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians," Professor Hugh Taylor AC, Harold Mitchell Professor of Indigenous Eye Health at the University of Melbourne said.

"There is now Roadmap activity across the whole country. With Australian Government support for the remaining recommendations, the gap for vision can be closed and we will be well on the way to end avoidable blindness in Indigenous communities by 2025, the goal set by Australia's Long Term National Health Plan.

"The increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership of eye care work, on all levels, is a crucial step towards ensuring the best and most appropriate models of care are available."

Additional Government support and program funding is required to deliver the commitment outlined in Australia's Long Term National Health Plan (2019).

[10th Annual Update on the Implementation of the Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision](#)

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