

Indigenous Eye Health Newsletter

June 2020



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

Update from Professor Hugh Taylor - Director of Indigenous Eye Health

The allegorical curse is “May you live in interesting times!” Well we certainly are. In the second week in March we made the significant decision not to hold the National Conference, two days later we moved to working from home and the next week we were locked out of our building. Changes none of us had foreseen or planned for. However, as a reflection of the great team we have, everyone has adapted and is working on furiously. We do lots of Zoom and Teams meetings, endless email and so forth. Although many of the communities and health services are swamped with coping with COVID-19 as you will see in this newsletter a lot of work is going on and progress is being made.

In 2019 COAG endorsed “the elimination of avoidable blindness” in Indigenous Australians as a priority. We expect more information to be included in the anticipated national Indigenous eye care roadmap to be available later in the year. Of course, like everything this has been slowed by the coronavirus related activities.

We were delighted to see the recent announcement from South Australia that they have introduced improvements to their subsidised spectacle scheme in line with the national guidelines. This is a huge and important change. We are looking to have WA, NT and Tasmania following suit.

This year’s theme for National Reconciliation Week was “In this together.” We are all in this together. We must all be in this together to get proper recognition and reconciliation for Australia’s First Nations people.

Finally, I would like to welcome Shannon Drake on the IEH Advisory Board. Shannon is the Manager of the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative in Mooroopna.

CTGV20 conference video presentations

In lieu of being able to hear the keynote presentations face-to-face at the conference, a number of our keynote speakers have kindly recorded presentations and video messages for conference delegates and the Indigenous eye health sector more broadly. We would like to thank The Hon. Greg Hunt MP, Dr Janine Mohamed, Dr Kris Rallah-Baker and Professor Hugh Taylor AC for taking the time to record their presentations so that they can be shared with you. We think they are great and capture important information and messages.

[View the videos here.](#)



**Close the Gap
for Vision by 2020**
NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2020
The Gap and Beyond

Barriers to cataract surgery

Professor Hugh Taylor and Mitchell Anjou wrote a paper about the barriers to cataract surgery which was published in Clinical Experimental Ophthalmology in February 2020. In the paper they show that cataract remains the leading cause of blindness in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and is still a major cause of vision loss. The pathway of care to cataract surgery has many potential gaps and barriers. Although there has been a significant increase in services over the last few years, there is still the urgent need to facilitate timely and affordable cataract surgery. Particularly for public surgery there needs to be a significant decrease in waiting times for the clinical assessment of those needing surgery and for those on a surgical waiting lists. One of the critical areas remaining to be addressed is the provision of access to prompt, culturally safe and affordable cataract surgery. Much needs to be done to rectify the often totally unacceptable waiting times for both outpatient assessment and cataract surgery in Australia's public hospitals.

[You can read the paper here.](#)

No return to ‘business as usual’: equity and the return of cataract surgeries

IEH staff members Dr Guy Gillor, Nick Schubert, Rosamond Gilden and Mitchell Anjou recently wrote a paper about equity in cataract surgery for Indigenous Australians which was published in *Insight*.

[Read the article here.](#)

The article references another piece also published in *Insight* that features contributions from Dr Kris-Rallah Baker (Ophthalmologist and President of the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association) and Shaun Tatipata (Indigenous Australia Program, Fred Hollows Foundation).

[Read the article here.](#)



Regional Implementation

Update about Roadmap Regional Implementation

The Roadmap implementation team had a busy start to the year with the usual regional and jurisdictional stakeholder meetings, including important exchanges in Tasmania and Western Australia and some formative regional stakeholder work in South Australia.

The COVID-19 pandemic began impacting work from mid-March, including the conference postponement, and the team initially began reaching out to stakeholders and stakeholder groups to check in and offer support where this was requested. We have tried to maintain contact as communities and organisations have responded to COVID-19 and have been very impressed and proud of the community-controlled sector’s strength and clarity in managing these serious challenges. We observe that the regional and jurisdictional Indigenous eye health stakeholder groups have adopted various strategies to their eye care work including virtual meetings and sharing of information through email.

Importantly the stakeholder groups have provided fora and opportunity for exchange and support of Indigenous eye health stakeholders and this seems to be an important structural and systems element that will allow appropriate reintroduction of eye care services as we emerge from the limitations imposed by the pandemic.

We look forward to reconnecting with stakeholders across the country in the second half of 2020.

Evaluation of Regional Implementation of The Roadmap'

Due to the implications of COVID-19, we have revised the methods and timelines for the evaluation. We are now working through multi-site ethics approvals with relevant ethics bodies and the evaluation tools are being finalized ready for data collection by the independent evaluators – ARTD Consultants and Clear Horizon consultants. The methods for collecting data for the evaluation will include a short online survey, key informant interviews and focus groups. To maintain social distancing the key informant interviews and focus groups will need to be conducted through video and telephone.

Connect with us



[Contact Us via Email here](#)



[Join Our Mailing List here](#)



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Reference Group

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group has been providing valuable guidance to the evaluation project. The group was established following the first co-design workshop to prioritise the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and includes members with a wide range of experience including health care delivery, community engagement, health promotion, program management, policy development, evaluation, communications and advocacy roles. Current members include: Anne-Marie Banfield and Shaun Tatipata (co-chairs), Nick Wilson (secretariat), Tania McLeod, Tony Coburn, Nicole Turner, Colin Moore, Emma Robertson and Nicole Tujague.

Expression of interest for case study sites

An Expression of Interest (EOI) will be released shortly, inviting regional networks to indicate their interest in being 'case study' sites for the evaluation. As agreed with the evaluation co-design group, we will aim to have representation from across different jurisdictions and remoteness areas.



38 people from across the country attended the first Co Design Evaluation workshop in October 2019.

The case studies will provide the opportunity for a deeper analysis of the different regional approaches to addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye care needs. Focus Groups and interviews for the case studies will be conducted by the Aboriginal Partnerships and Projects team at ARTD Consultants.

For more information about the evaluation, visit the evaluation section of the IEH website or contact: Tessa.Saunders@unimelb.edu.au

Encouraging Optometrists to Identify

Optometry Australia is encouraging optometrists to identify if they are of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin at membership renewal time. This will ultimately help improve care for Indigenous people.

The Association will ask two questions in check boxes relating to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin: Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, and, if so; Do you wish to be contacted by Optometry Australia to explore opportunities to contribute to the Association?

IEH staff member and optometrist Mitchell Anjou said it was important to support the identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners because these colleagues are the most knowledgeable and best positioned to help improve eye care service to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, having both an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background and optometry expertise.

[Read the full article on the Optometry Australia website here.](#)

Expansion of SA subsidised spectacles scheme

In a welcome move, the SA government has introduced free standard glasses for eligible Aboriginal customers, as well as optional upgrades to standard glasses for those who meet the criteria.

[Read the full article on the Insight website here.](#)



Update about the 'Strong eyes, strong communities' sector framework

Work continues towards implementation of the recommendations of Strong eyes, strong communities – A five-year plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision, 2019-2024. It is expected that it will form the backbone for the anticipated national Indigenous eye care roadmap to be developed by Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC) as part of the Long-Term National Health Plan commitment to "eliminate avoidable blindness".

The funding requests and recommendations within the plan are currently being reviewed through AHMAC processes with outcomes expected towards the end of the calendar year. Concurrently, eye health sector organisations including the IEH are working on action plans for the twenty-four recommendations, under the umbrella of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee of the eye sector's peak body, Vision 2020 Australia.

Achievements in the first 12 months since the plan's release include:

- continuation of outreach programs including VOS, RHOF and MOICDP to 2024, and intention to review some program guidelines
- extended support for AIHW national reporting
- tender released for the second National Eye Health Survey to be conducted in 2020-2021
- Provision of Eye Health Equipment and Training (PEHET) project has been extended to June 2021 – this includes ongoing training and support for retinal cameras and provision of additional slit lamps

The full report and recommendations can be found on Vision 2020 Australia's website [here](#).

Strong eyes, strong communities – overview



Strong eyes, strong communities: a five year plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision 2019-24.

'Asking the Question' resource distributed to Optometrists across Australia

In 2019, a desktop resource was developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community consultation and input through Indigenous Eye Health at The University of Melbourne. The resource prompts clinicians and practice staff to ask – "Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?" and encourages patients to volunteer this information. An information sheet is provided with the desktop resource.

To align with an article about the resource being published in optometry publication 'Pharma', hard copies of the resource were delivered to approx. 5,000 Optometrists across Australia along with their copy of 'Pharma'. We would like to thank Optometry Australia for their support of the 'Asking the Question' resource.

This resource is also available for ordering on the IEH website [here](#). You can read more about this on the Optometry Australia website [here](#).



'Asking the Question' toblerone resource

TRACHOMA



Update about the Trachoma Elimination Program

We have been pleased to be able to contribute to the great effort by many communities, organisations and governments towards the messages around washing hands and good hygiene during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Milpa has adapted and added another key message to his repertoire – “cough and sneeze into your elbow”. With all of the previous consultation around “Milpa’s Six Steps to Stop Germs” this has complemented our approach.

While community visits have limited face-to-face health promotion and community engagement, we have found other avenues for our efforts.

You can read more about some of these activities and resources in this newsletter.

The importance of access to soap during COVID-19

In April IEH staff based in Alice Springs coordinated the distribution of 11,000 bars of free soap to organisations and communities in Central Australia from organisation [Soap Aid](#). The soap will support hand washing and good hygiene practices to stop the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases such as trachoma.

Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation, Children's Ground, MacDonnell Regional Council, Central Desert Regional Council NPY Women's Council, FaFT and the Remote Schools Support Unit NT Department of Education all played a part to ensure that every remote community in the Central Australia Region received soap and hygiene resources.

Further afield Katherine West Health Board, Anyinginyi Aboriginal Corporation and the Aboriginal Community Council of SA also received Soap Aid to help families in communities and town camps. In WA, Soap Aid has continued to be delivered with resources and education through the Squeaky-Clean Kids program.

We would like to say a very big thank you to Mark and the team at S&R Constructions in Alice Springs for their generosity in helping us move the pallets of soap from the truck to our storage shed in Alice Springs.

[NACCHO Australia](#) provide COVID-19 updates and a range of information and resources on their website and hand washing organisation ['Wash Em'](#) provide expertise, knowledge and resources around hand washing and hygiene.

Soap is also being distributed to houses and yards across the APY Lands in South Australia, turning yard taps into hand washing stations to strengthen the fight against COVID-19. Courtesy of Soap Aid, Rotary and some creative thinking by the resourceful UPK Environmental Health Program at Nganampa Health Council.

[Read more here.](#)

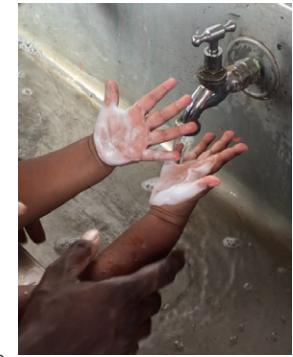


(L-R) Ian and Darren from Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC) and Jane from Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation collecting soap.

Update around soap in schools

Earlier this year we wrote an article published on [Pursuit](#) about the provision of soap in schools.

As an update to this article, we are pleased to advise that South Australia, Western Australia and NSW like the other jurisdictions and have indicated (either in correspondence or on their website) that they are supporting schools with extra cleaning, focus on hand hygiene and the provision of soap and hand sanitiser. We welcome this emphasis on good hygiene. We are however, keen to see this as a permanent policy change not just as a response to the COVID-19 situation. The ongoing provision of soap in schools and early learning settings and the learning about germs and the importance of good hygiene must continue in all places including remote settings. Regular prompts and reminders to encourage behaviour change are also important.



[Resources and adaptations are available via our website.](#)

Environmental Health

Environmental health and housing continue to be a priority for the trachoma program.



We are currently in the process of developing a new TV ad with Indigenous Community TV (ICTV) which promotes the use of the SAFE bathroom checklist resource in reporting housing repairs and maintenance issues. We look forward to sharing this ad with you all soon.

To ensure clean hands and faces remain a priority, the Willowra Youth Program created this portable Milpa wash station. Great work!

Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs resources

The ‘Milpa’s Six Steps to Stop Germs’ suite of resources have now been published on the IEH website. These resources focus on the six daily steps kids need to follow to keep strong and healthy to prevent trachoma and infectious conditions.

We encourage communities and organisations to adapt the resources using local images and information. We are available to assist communities and organisations to create their own adaptations of the ‘Milpa’s Six Steps to Stop Germs’ suite of resources.

[View the resources here.](#)



New version of 'Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs' portrait style poster

COVID-19 resources

In collaboration with our partners, we developed a suite of health promotion materials that are aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Included in the suite of resources is a poster template that can be customised with local information and messages.

We are available to assist communities and organisations to create their own adaptations of these COVID-19 resources.

[View more information here.](#)



New COVID-19 'Cough and Sneeze into your Elbow' resources

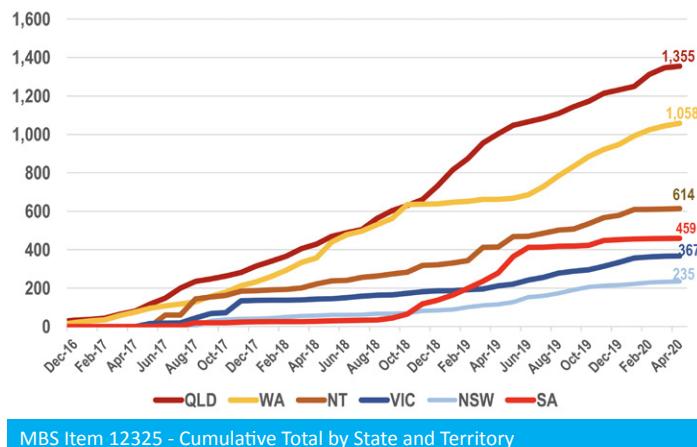


Diabetes Eye Care

MBS Item 12325 Update

The latest data on usage of the Medicare Item number (MBS 12325) for retinal photography screening shows growth in usage in all states and territories across Australia, especially in Queensland and Western Australia.

IEH has a range of resources to assist in retinal photography screening which can be found on the [IEH website](#).



National Diabetes Week 2020

National Diabetes Week is fast approaching. This year National Diabetes Week will be held from 12 July to 18 July 2020. National Diabetes Week provides a great opportunity to promote the importance of YEARLY eye checks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with diabetes. We will be releasing a special NDW edition of the Check Today, See Tomorrow Diabetes Eye Care eBulletin in the lead up to National Diabetes Week.

[Sign-up to here](#) to receive the 'Check Today, See Tomorrow' Diabetes Eye Care eBulletin.

[Click here](#) to view the range of 'Check Today, See Tomorrow' Diabetes Eye Care resources.

Share Your Story expands to include stories from individuals working in the sector

IEH are excited to announce the expansion of our 'Share Your Story' initiative to include stories from individuals working in the Indigenous eye health sector. The new initiative is called 'Share Your Story: Personal Reflections'.

In the first story from this initiative, Colin Moore, a Wandandian – Wadi Wadi man from the Yuin Nation of NSW and former IEH staff member, shares his journey from NSW to Central Australia and the importance of culture in his life and work.

[Read Colin's story here](#).



Connect with us



[Like Our Facebook Pages here](#)
[IEH | Trachoma | Diabetes](#)



[Follow Us on Twitter here](#)



Share Your Story: Success Stories

Over the past 6 months we have released a number of stories from the 'Share Your Story: Success Stories' initiative. We would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to share their story. For more information and to get involved visit the IEH website. Check out some of the stories below:



The #EndingTrachoma Environmental Health project aims to reduce the incidence of trachoma and skin infections in 'trachoma at risk' Aboriginal communities in remote Western Australia through environmental health strategies by December 2021. They do this through a combination of long-term planning with communities and hands on service provision and the key partners are the Aboriginal Environmental Health Workers who are employed within remote communities.

[Read more about their great work here](#).

Feltman is a diabetes teaching tool made by the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) and Diabetes Victoria. It is designed to help health professionals explain diabetes in a way that is easy to understand and can be used with individuals and community groups, as a one-way demonstration or as a two-way interactive workshop. The development of an eye health 'add-on' for the popular diabetes health promotion resource Feltman provides opportunities for community members to learn more about the prevention and management of diabetes-related eye health conditions.

[Read more about Feltman getting his eyes, here](#).

Housing Maintenance Officers (HMOs) play an important role in trachoma elimination by maintaining functioning health hardware in homes. This SYS story explores the delivery of trachoma education and training to housing maintenance and repair staff working in remote communities.

[Read more here](#).



Mel and Scott from #endingtrachoma Share their story "Tackling Trachoma in Remote Communities"

IEH welcomes Shannon Drake to our Advisory Board

Shannon Drake is a proud Wamba Wamba/Jaara woman who has worked at Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative since February 2001. Shannon is also committed to education guest lectures at a number of universities. Shannon is fully aware of the trauma, oppression and disparity faced by Aboriginal people. She has a Bachelor of Nursing, Diploma in Business and Community Management, and Masters in Public Health and she believes it's imperative to instil values of an equalitarian health paradigm to create self-determination and empowerment.

Staffing update

IEH would like to farewell staff members Angela Thiel and Colin Moore who both worked in the trachoma program. We would like to thank both Angela and Colin for their hard work and contributions. You can read a bit more about Colin in our most recent Share Your Story. We would also like to welcome Karl Hampton to the IEH team. Karl joins us as the Senior Trachoma Engagement Officer, based in Alice Springs. Congratulations to Carol Wynne who has a new addition to her family, Riley James born in December 2019.

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, stakeholder and advisory board for contributing to and supporting this important work.