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## **Annual update marks a decade of progress to close the gap for vision**

The tenth Annual Update on the Implementation of The Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision shows over the past year continued good progress in the implementation of the Roadmap's recommendations and the provision of eye services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Roadmap was first launched in 2012 and a decade of work implementing these recommendations has delivered health systems change and improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

However, the report also shows clear service shortfalls and that equity gaps still remain in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye care.

This year's update highlights regional stakeholder groups initiated across the country but points to the critical importance of Indigenous leadership within regional and jurisdictional eye care collaborations.

Australia's Long Term National Health Plan (2019) has committed to 'end avoidable blindness in Indigenous communities by 2025'. The Roadmap report identifies 12 activities under this national priority that still rely on government funding commitments that are yet to be announced. These activities are consistent with Vision 2020 Australia's Strong Eyes, Strong Communities, sector-endorsed five year plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision 2019-2024.

The report shows:

- 121 of 138 (88%) of projected Roadmap activities are completed, and 27 of 42 (64%) of recommendations completed
- Australian Government delivery on the commitment to 'end avoidable blindness...by 2025' would complete 90% of the Roadmap recommendations and 96% of Roadmap activities
- Roadmap activities are underway in all 64 self-defined regions across Australia, now covering the entire land mass and the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population
- Eye health collaborative groups have been initiated in all jurisdictions
- Eye examination rates continue to grow, but the Visiting Optometrists Scheme (VOS) needs to further support this growth with increased funding to population-based needs
- The number of cataract surgeries provided for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians increases steadily, but still only meets 43% of estimated need in the latest reporting period. Further support is needed for visiting ophthalmology services

- In public hospitals, there is still an unacceptable equity gap in wait times between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, though this gap has decreased in some jurisdictions
- The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients with diabetes who have an annual eye exam varies across jurisdictions, but must increase further
- The number of trachoma hotspots has reduced to 16 in 2020 and the rates of trachoma are remaining steady at less than 5%
- The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to impact access to eye care services, and its cumulative impact on the health system needs to be considered

The following quotes are attributed to Professor Hugh Taylor:

‘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 controlled 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.

There is now Roadmap activity across the whole country. With Australian Government support for the remaining Roadmap recommendations, the gap for vision can be closed and we will be well on the way to ‘end avoidable blindness...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.’

You can view the Annual Update [here](#).

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