



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Plan to save the sight of 32,000 Indigenous Australians will generate millions

The eyesight of more than 32,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would be saved if the Government invested just \$227 million over 10 years, a new report has found.

The *Value of Indigenous Sight* PwC report, commissioned by University of Melbourne Indigenous Eye Health, was released today. It measures the value of implementing 42 recommendations in the University's Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision.

It shows each extra dollar invested in the Roadmap, would return \$2.50 to the Australian economy from productivity, tax and welfare savings – a total of \$578 million. Under the current system, every health dollar invested generates 90 cents.

Professor Hugh Taylor, Chair of Indigenous Eye Health at the University of Melbourne, said the report shows current spending is inefficient and doesn't reach two-thirds of those who need it.

"Indigenous kids start off with much better vision than other kids, but by the age of 40 and above adults experience six times the rate of blindness. We must provide Indigenous Australians with the basic eye care that every other Australian needs and gets."

PwC partner James van Smeerdijk said current Government investment in Indigenous eye health is \$40 million for 2015-2016. The roadmap requires \$23 million more investment to fully implement the recommended changes.

"The cost equates to less than \$23 million dollars of additional government spending per year – and represents less than 0.5% of this year's Federal Health Budget," Mr van Smeerdijk said.

"As a community, we have struggled to make progress on closing the gap in outcomes for Indigenous Australians. Yet here is one area where there is a practical plan to close the gap, and our work has shown that it can achieve strong economic and social benefits for a fairly modest investment."

Professor Taylor and his team will meet with politicians and policy makers in Canberra today to discuss the report. Over the next two weeks, they will tour the country and take the report to high-level departmental meetings in every capital city.

He said 94 per cent of vision loss could be easily prevented. Yet one-third of Indigenous adults have never had even a basic eye exam and for those with diabetes, only 20 per cent get the annual eye exam that they need.

"Last week our Prime Minister spent time in Indigenous communities. He has made a commitment to address the health issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples," Prof Taylor said.

"It is outlined very clearly in the Roadmap and this report that we can fix eye health, we have a plan and it will save the Australian people money. We are saying that we can close 11 per cent of the health gap for Indigenous people, essentially overnight.

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“You give someone glasses they will see right away, give them cataract surgery and they will see the next day.

“The patient journey for Indigenous Australians needing eye care is like a leaky pipe. If you only fix one or two of the holes, it will continue to leak. What we’re telling the politicians and policy makers is we can fix all of the holes in the system and get a financial return as well.

#### Key findings from the study

- The report looks at the cost of preventing and treating long and short-sightedness, old-age vision degeneration, cataract, diabetic retinopathy and the communicable disease, trachoma.
- It quantified cost-savings from productivity gains, savings for the health system and tax and welfare savings.
- 94 per cent of vision loss in Indigenous Australians is preventable or treatable.
- If investment does not increase, 34,000 Indigenous Australians will suffer low vision or blindness in the next 10 years. The Roadmap could save 32,000 of these.
- Investment in the Roadmap’s recommendations (in addition to current eye care) will cost \$230 million over 10 years, but will generate \$578 million in additional economic benefits.
- Currently, for every \$1 spent on eye health, 90 cents is generated for the Australian economy. The Roadmap will result in a \$2.50 return for every \$1, if all recommendations are implemented.
- The total return to the economy, if accounting for current investment and investing in the Roadmap, would be \$856 million over the 10 years from 2015-2024.
- The benefits to the Australian economy are quantified as productivity of the individual (\$529 million), productivity of carers (\$255 million), avoided health costs (\$30 million) and avoided tax burden (\$41 million).
- Current Government investment in Indigenous eye health is \$40 million for 2015-2016. The roadmap requires \$23 million more investment in 2016 to fully implement the recommended changes.

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