

A focus on children's vision

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Background

Significant efforts have been made to Close the Gap for Vision, with many successes, including halving rates of blindness in Indigenous Australians compared with other Australians and reducing trachoma rates in Indigenous children. Previous reports suggest Indigenous children have better vision than non-Indigenous children; with increasing visual demands in school-aged children we investigated whether this remains true.

Our study

278 regional Queensland primary and secondary schoolchildren underwent an eye examination; 40% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. No differences existed in the proportion of children presenting with reduced vision, $<6/9$ (Indigenous: 7/110; non-Indigenous: 13/168); nor were there differences in the proportion of children with excellent vision, $\geq 6/3.8$ (Indigenous: 6/110; non-Indigenous: 5/168).

Overall, 31% (85/272) of children were long-sighted, 3% (8/272) short-sighted and 5% (13/272) of children had astigmatism only. Spectacles were worn by 27% (23/85) of children with long-sightedness, 50% (4/8) with short-sightedness and 8% (1/13) with astigmatism. Spectacle wear was similar across children, but significantly less Indigenous children had previously had an eye examination (23% v 52%).

Conclusions

Indigenous and non-Indigenous children had similar levels of vision. Importantly, over a quarter of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children had refractive error, much of which was uncorrected.