

## Outreach Optometry at Congress: The Strength in Partnerships.

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**Introduction:** Eye problems are one of the most common health issues experienced by the Australian population, with Aboriginal people experiencing a much higher burden of eye disease than the general population. 1 in 9 Aboriginal Australians 40 years and older suffer from some sort of vision impairment or blindness. The three leading causes of vision loss in Aboriginal Australians aged 40 years and over include refractive error (63%), cataract (20%) and diabetic retinopathy (5.5%). Although 94% of vision loss in Aboriginal Australians is preventable or treatable, an estimated one third of Aboriginal people with Diabetes had not had an eye examination in the preceding 12 months or not at all.

**Aim:** To describe the collaborative, trusting and respectful relationship between Congress and the Brien Holden Vision Institute in providing outreach optometry services to five remote Congress auspiced clinics and the urban clinic in Alice Springs.

**Method:** Information on the collaborative program was obtained from the Memorandum of Understanding between Congress and Brien Holden Vision Institute, feedback surveys by Health clinic managers and Optometrists, trip reports from Congress eye coordinator and other local staff.

**Relevance:** Without gaining trust and respect from all participants, any program to be delivered to remote Aboriginal communities may fail to establish or become unsustainable. Having short-term contract optometrists working with a full time Eye Health Coordinator has proven effective means of providing outreach optometry that is culturally safe, efficient, sustainable and locally responsive.

**Conclusion:** This eye program demonstrates the 'The Strength in partnerships' where two organisations play complementary roles, linking short term contracted optometrists with remote clinics and linking them with the Congress Eye Health Coordinator to provide comprehensive eye services to Congress remote and town clients.