

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EYE HEALTH COORDINATORS GRADUATE ABORIGINAL HEALTH COLLEGE

A milestone was reached this month in the development of the Aboriginal Health College when the first Graduates of the College were presented their Certificates and Diplomas at the Scientia Building of the University of NSW.

The Aboriginal Health College is being constructed on a magnificent ocean front site at Little Bay, in Sydney, and is due to be completed in December 2008.

The Hon. Paul Lynch M.P., Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, attended the ceremony and delivered the opening address followed by Christine Corby, OAM, CM, Chair of the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AHMRC) and CEO of Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS).

Graduates received Certificates, Diplomas or Statement of Attainment in Eye Care Skills Sets; Foundation Skills in Alcohol and other Drug work; Workplace Assessment and Training; Community Services (case Management with a focus on Aboriginal Sexual Health).

Five of those receiving the Statement of Attainment in relation to the Eye Care Skills Sets presently work as Eye Health Coordinators in Wellington, Bourke, Kempsey, Wagga Wagga and Walgett.

The Eye Care Skills sets were developed with the assistance of ICEE and Prof. Fiona Stapleton, Head of the School of Optometry and Vision Science at the University of NSW.

Eye Health Coordinators are the people who make the AHMRC/International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE) Eye Health and Vision Care program the success it is. All work with visiting Optometrists to organize Eye Clinics, conduct vision and eye screening programs in schools and pre schools and are responsible for creating awareness of the need for regular eye examinations.

The first AHMRC/ICEE Eye and Vision Care Clinic was conducted by an ICEE optometrist at Walgett AMS, in December 1999. That year there were about 70,000 applications for spectacles made to the NSW Government's Spectacles program. As best as can be determined, only about 25 of those were received from Aboriginal people, highlighting the need for trained Aboriginal Eye Health Coordinators to spread the word on eye health.

Clinics are now conducted at 82 locations in NSW. Each year in excess of 2500 eye examinations are conducted by ICEE optometrists, all within Aboriginal Community Controlled Health facilities and a similar number of pairs of spectacles are supplied.

Due to the efforts and the enthusiasm of the Eye Health Coordinators the program continues to grow and provide a great service previously unavailable to very many Aboriginal people.

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Written by Professor Brian Layland for ICEE.

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International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE) vision is to create a world where everyone has access to eye care. In the world today more than 300million people are blind or visually impaired because they don't have glasses.