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ABORIGINAL EYECARE

NEWSLETTER



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ABORIGINAL EYECARE
NEWSLETTER

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WELCOME!

Welcome to the first official newsletter that is designed for all eye health care providers who are helping to provide the indigenous communities with the care that they so need!

By working in an Aboriginal controlled health care centre, you are helping a community that is known to suffer 10 times the rate of blindness and is more at risk of losing their vision because of preventable or treatable conditions.

Sadly, due to problems with accessibility of eye care services, particularly in remote communities, many indigenous Australians put up with visual disabilities that could be easily avoided.

To help provide a solution to this problem, eye clinics have been set up at Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS) clinics around NSW. The success of these clinics can be credited to collaboration between the ACCHS centres, the International Centre for Eye care Education (ICEE), the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AHMRC), The NSW Government Rural Aerial Health Service, Optometrists, Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and the Royal Flying Doctors service.

The first eye care clinic was conducted in Walgett in December 1999 and eye

care is now provided in 73 locations throughout NSW. The program has been extremely successful, with over 12,000 consultations and 10,000 pairs of spectacles provided to aboriginal communities during this time.

EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

In 1998 the Review of Eye Health Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities revealed a lack of regional coordination of eye services in NSW, and the need to establish a focal point from which to provide and coordinate services and disseminate education. In response, the Commonwealth Government made funds available to appoint regional Aboriginal Eye Health Coordinators for rural and outback NSW.

ICEE received a Commonwealth grant to establish a course of training for the coordinators in 2000. ICEE Education is designed to provide essential support to the Coordinators and other health workers, which will significantly enhance the service they are able to provide to their communities. Ongoing training has taken place on-site and at local ACCHS and at ICEE.

Our next course will be in Sydney in October, 2005. For more information, please contact Nina Tahhan on (02) 9385 7481 or n.tahhan@icee.org



ICEE PROGRAM DIRECTOR



Professor Brian Layland is ICEE Director of the NSW Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Eyecare Program. Over the past 50 years he has played a major role in the development of Australian optometry and the improvement of eyecare services in this country.

His major accomplishments include the acceptance of optometric services into Medicare and Veterans' Affairs; the establishment and development of VisionCare NSW, the Optometric Vision Research Foundation, and other organisations dedicated to eyecare research, education and service delivery; and the many thousands of satisfied patients he saw in over 45 years of practice. In 1979 he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia, for services to the profession of optometry.

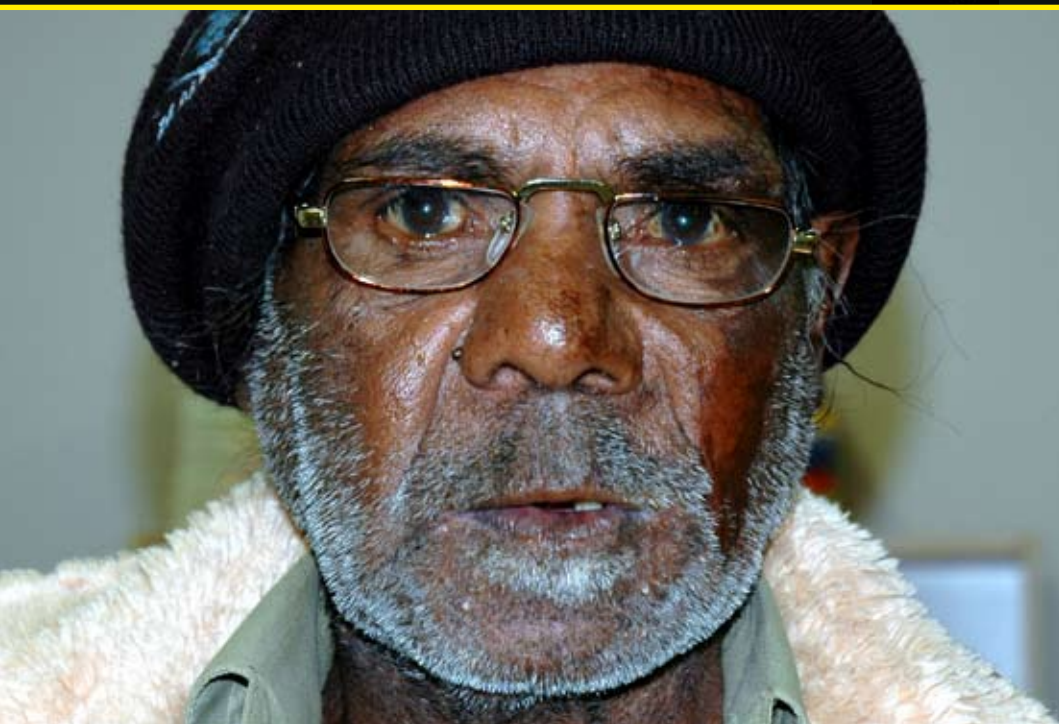
He has now largely turned his talents to improving Aboriginal eyecare. In November 1999, at an early meeting of Vision 2020: The Right to Sight, Australia, in Melbourne it was said that there were about 120,000 people in Australia who were either blind or severely visually impaired as a result of uncorrected refractive error. It was also said that a high percentage of these people were members of the Aboriginal community.

ICEE undertook to tackle the problem in NSW. Having retired from practice in 1995, in 1999 Brian Layland joined ICEE and was the driving force behind the establishment of the program, building effective collaborations to deliver eyecare to those in need.

At the age of 74, Brian still plays a very active role in the program, travelling to many regions to deliver eyecare services himself. They are long days with an early plane trip and a long line of patients, but Brian enjoys the contact with patients and the chance to do something for people in need.



ABORIGINAL EYECARE NEWSLETTER



CONGRATULATIONS!

We are very pleased to announce that the NSW Aboriginal Eyecare Program has been recognised with an Encouragement Award in the 2005 Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Community Business Partnerships.

"It has been an outstanding success for the team and for Aboriginal communities who now have access to much-needed eyecare", adds Ms Sandra Bailey, CEO of the AHMRC.

The Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Community Business Partnerships, established in 1999, are presented each year to recognise and reward those businesses and community organisations that work in partnership: sharing skills, expertise, time and resources to address problems of disadvantage and to build stronger local communities. In 2005, 284 nominations were received.

The Awards were presented on August 25 at an awards luncheon in Sydney by the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator The Honourable Kay Patterson. The Encouragement Award was received by Ms Sandra Bailey; Professor Brian Layland, Director of the ICEE Aboriginal Eyecare Program; and Professor Deborah Sweeney, the CEO of the Vision CRC.

Professor Layland believes that the key to the success of this Program has been collaboration and cooperation. "Working through and with Aboriginal community-controlled health services, and harnessing business, State, Federal, community and professional organisations and individuals has ensured that the services are well accepted by the community – feedback from our patients has been very enthusiastic – and that the services will be sustainable."