

ABORIGINAL EYECARE

NEWSLETTER

Issue 8 , Mar 2010



ICEE

THANKYOU!

The ICEE Aboriginal Vision Team would like to thank our partners across Australia.

It is support from hard-working Regional Eye Health Coordinators, optometrists, Aboriginal Medical Service staff and Community Health Centre staff that help ICEE provide essential eye care services to Australia's Aboriginal population.

We take this opportunity to look back on the successes of 2009 and update you on our future activities.

We look forward to working with you in 2010!

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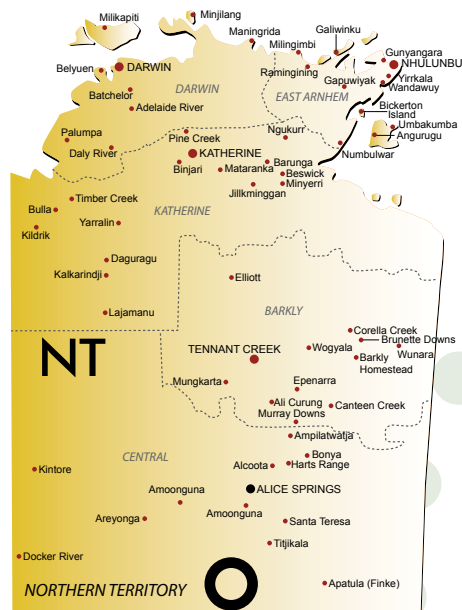
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2009 IN REVIEW OPTOMETRIC SERVICE DELIVERY

Throughout 2009, strong partnerships between ICEE and Aboriginal Medical Services have enabled provision of optometry services to more than 100 locations in NSW and 45 in the NT.

ICEE optometry trips are arranged through close collaboration with REHCs, who coordinate all eye care services within their regions and provide invaluable eye care service support, for optometrists and patients. ICEE would like to take this opportunity to thank all REHCs and optometrists who make this programme a success.

In 2010, with funding from the State and Territory Governments, and the Commonwealth Visiting Optometrists Scheme, ICEE seeks to increase outreach services in both NSW and the NT.



2008/2009 Financial Year	NSW	NT
No. of eye exams	3376	1540
No. of glasses prescribed	3579	942

* Please see maps and tables for communities' visited and number of patients seen 2008/2009.

NOTICE BOARD



AHWs Charlie (Maningrida) practicing trachoma checks on Russell (Palumpa)

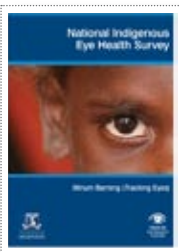
TRAINING AND EDUCATION

A big year for eye health education, 2009 saw ICEE train 37 people in the NT and 28 in NSW - workshops were held in Darwin, Nhulunbuy, Alice Springs and Sydney. Courses up-skilled participants in basic eye and vision care, prepared students to conduct basic eye and vision screening, understand common eye and vision disorders, and better explain eye problems to their patients.

We are pleased to announce that several AHW workshops are planned for 2010.

Dates are as follows:

Alice Springs	March 2 - 4	Central Australia / Barkly, Aboriginal Health Workers
Katherine	March 16 - 18	Katherine Region, Aboriginal Health Workers
Sydney	May 31 – June 4	Sydney, Eye Health Coordinators



NATIONAL INDIGENOUS EYE HEALTH SURVEY (NIEHS)

The results of the National Indigenous Eye Health Survey were released on September 28, 2009.

For a copy of the summary report, go to:

http://www.iehu.unimelb.edu.au/the_national_indigenous_eye_health_survey

WORLD CONGRESS ON REFRACTIVE ERROR

The second World Congress on Refractive Error is being held in Durban, South Africa, September 20-22, 2010, under the theme Vision Correction: Broadening the Development Agenda. Hosted by ICEE, the Congress will bring together world leaders in eye care and development fields to build strategies to achieve sustainable, integrated solutions that transcend the boundaries of eye care and encompass social, political and economic solutions.

The congress presents a unique opportunity to learn from and network with people working in the eye care development sector. Those interested in attending can register at www.icee.org, or if there is something you would like to present (either a paper or a poster), the call for abstracts is open until 1 April 2010.

2009 REHC ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NT AHW Awards: A big congratulations to Dorothy Butler, Katherine Regional Eye Health Coordinator, from Wurli Wurlijang Health Service. Dorothy was named runner-up in the Specialised Practitioner category of the NT Aboriginal Health Worker Awards. Well done Dot!

NSW Milestone: Phyllis Tighe celebrated her ten year anniversary at Walgett AMS. Having worked in many areas of Indigenous health, five years ago Phyllis applied her extensive knowledge to the role of Regional Eye Health Coordinator. Phyllis continues to provide excellent eye care services in Walgett and the surrounding communities. Congratulations Phyllis!



In January 2009, Anna joined ICEE as Project Development Officer for Aboriginal Eye Care. Anna's previous experience was as an optometrist in Alice Springs, where outreach optometry work in Central communities fostered an interest in Indigenous eye care. The opportunity to join the ICEE Aboriginal Vision team saw Anna re-locate 'just up the track', 1500km of Stuart Highway, to Darwin. Anna is based at the Danila Dilba Health Service, where she provides regular optometry clinics.

Many of our NT readers will know Anna from her outreach optometry activities and AHW training courses.

Looking forward to 2010, Anna anticipates a busy year with increased outreach services across the breadth of the Territory, and continued eye health training.

"I really appreciate this unique opportunity I have to work as an optometrist in the field of Indigenous eye health. The Northern Territory is such a diverse area, with rich cultural diversity and equally varied landscapes, seasons and climates. Working with such a great team of Regional Eye Health Coordinators and optometrists is a pleasure. I am positive that, as we continue to work as a team, we will slowly but surely work to improve access to eye care services to people living in some of the remotest locations in Australia."



Maree (right) with her assistant, Angela

Since 2006, Maree O'Hara has been Regional Eye Health Coordinator (REHC) for the Barkly Shire, in the Northern Territory. The Barkly Shire is 322,500 km² and has a population of approximately 7,531 people. Maree, based at Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation (AHAC) in Tennant Creek, is a registered nurse originally from Sydney. For 20 years, Maree has worked in Aboriginal health, education and employment - across several locations in NSW, QLD and the NT. Maree's job involves coordinating and assisting with all eye health related activities in the Barkly Shire.

WE ASKED MAREE SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT HER JOB:

What got you interested in eye health?

"I had previously worked for Anyinginyi as Lecturer for Certificate III in Aboriginal Health Work (Clinical). This was a very satisfying position and I was interested in working for Anyinginyi again. The staff I knew as hard working and inspirational and when I met the ophthalmologist - Dr Tim Henderson - I knew I had made the right decision. There are so many aspects to eye health my interest has only increased."

How does ICEE complement your programs?

"When I started in 2006 there was only one 5-day visit to Tennant Creek that year. Access to optometrists was difficult; following good advice from an optometrist, I rang ICEE to ask for help. In 2008 there were 78 optometrist days throughout the Barkly which ICEE does. ICEE has covered 11 communities in the past with 2 more major communities added for next year. ICEE also introduced the Low Cost Spectacle Scheme which allowed people to pay for inexpensive glasses through Centrelink. This has completely changed the accessibility of glasses to most of the population. ICEE also runs educational workshops for the REHCs and other personnel involved in Eye Health."

What do you love about your job?

"I feel very, very lucky to have this job. I am surrounded by committed people in Eye Health. It is very satisfying to be able to assist so many. This year I have an assistant, Angela Hampton who has only enhanced the Eye Program and allowed me to do more Health Education and Promotion and assisted with both. She covers the huge administration component and when ICEE sends us 2 optometrists - which is most of the time - I take one to a community and Angela will run the clinic for the other."

What are the hard parts about your job?

"People who do not keep appointments. Even with AHAC's tremendous support (drivers who hand deliver appointment letters and pick people up on the day), many people still do not keep appointments. It is hard to know that some people's eyesight will deteriorate so much that help is not possible. Fortunately this does not happen often as we keep trying with people until they are ready to keep their appointments."

Why is your role important?

Because I coordinate all the Eye Health activities in the Barkly and people now expect to have a consistent, good service that will allow them to be able to see as well as possible, whether it be through glasses or surgery."

Can you share a memorable moment?

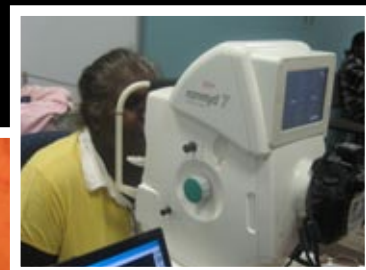
"Still one of my most memorable moments was when I met a particular traditional Aboriginal woman not long after I arrived. She had lost eyesight in one eye due to diabetic retinopathy and had a cataract in the other eye. She was dependent on her family for care for 2 years. Dr Henderson operated on the cataract on a Tuesday. On Wednesday the pad came off. The following Saturday she went hunting for the first time in 2 years and caught 4 goanna. Next week she caught several porcupine. She was no longer dependent and was the record hunter in the family!"

What advice/encouragement would you offer to other REHCs?

"Sometimes the job is enormous in its scope and expectations. My encouragement: dwell on the achievements and not on situations (like non attendance at appointments) that are beyond control. This is an enormously satisfying job with an extremely varied clientele. Enjoy being able to assist people in so many ways!"

FACTS

- 50% of people with type 2 diabetes don't even know they have it
- 10-30% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have diabetes
- Everybody who has diabetes can get diabetic retinopathy
- A person is more likely to get retinopathy if
 - They have had diabetes for a long time
 - They have poor blood sugar control
- The outside of the eye usually looks normal with diabetic retinopathy
- Most people with diabetic retinopathy will not know they have it in the early stages
- People with diabetic retinopathy are also more likely to have nephropathy (kidney problems) and peripheral neuropathy (poorer sensation in hands and feet)
- The only way to detect diabetic retinopathy early is for an optometrist or ophthalmologist to check vision under standardized conditions and to have the inside of the eye examined through dilated pupils every year
- Prevention is the best way. Good control of blood sugar, as well as blood pressure and cholesterol, will reduce the risk of diabetic retinopathy.
- Laser treatment does not cure diabetic retinopathy, nor restore vision already lost – it just helps to control it, and stop more damage from happening.
- It is important to have laser treatment as soon as possible, so blindness can be prevented.



Patient at screening



Diabetic retinopathy – bleeding on the retina

Fundus photographs – one way to look for diabetic retinopathy



Normal Vision



Norm Vision with diabetic retinopathy al Vision

What to tell people with diabetes

- Control their blood sugar; no “peaks and troughs”
- Check for diabetic retinopathy when they are diagnosed with diabetes, then every year
- Have their eyes checked immediately if they notice any changes in their vision
- Have treatment for diabetic retinopathy before it's too late

I SEE FOR CULTURE RESOURCES

In 2009, ICEE developed an image - based eye health and vision care resource package, specifically for use in rural and remote Indigenous health centres. The resource kit, named I See for Culture, was funded by the Australian Government Department of Health & Ageing and developed by ICEE in collaboration with other eye care and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health organisations.

The resource kit and awareness campaign were designed to help health workers explain and discuss eye health and vision conditions with their Aboriginal patients. Mark Ella, first Aboriginal captain of Australia's Rugby Wallabies, is Ambassador for I See for Culture.



The Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Service Delivery, the Honourable Warren Snowdon launched the resource kit in October 2009. The Minister applauded the initiative and encouraged communities to use the resources to address eye care education with their patients.

To find out more about I See for Culture or download and print a version of the resources visit www.icee.org and follow the ICEE education links.

ICEE would like to thank everyone who provided feedback, advice and trialed the pilot resources.