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giving sight



BACKGROUND

In 1998, there were no eye care clinics available at any of the NSW Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS). The Federal Government and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation both agreed that the provision of eye care clinics within NSW Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Facilities would encourage Aboriginal people to access eye and vision care services. It was stated by the NSW Department of Community Services that very few Aboriginal people in NSW took advantage of the Government's spectacle programme which made spectacles available at no cost to eligible applicants.

PURPOSE

- At the inaugural meeting of the WHO sponsored Vision 2020 Australia in 1999, Professor Brien Holden and Professor Brian Layland undertook to plan and introduce a programme directed at providing eye and vision care services to Aboriginal communities. The Federal Government agreed to provide funding.
- Barriers to the provision of eye care services within Aboriginal communities included accessibility, economic status, perceived cost, previous poor experiences, lack of culturally appropriate services and lack of eye care services within Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Facilities.
- The International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE) NSW Aboriginal Eyecare Programme was designed to overcome such barriers and provide a culturally appropriate and easily accessible service within Aboriginal community controlled facilities.



FIGURE 1: Map showing the different regions covered by the seven Aboriginal Eye Health Coordinators.

RESULTS

- The first ICEE eye clinic was conducted at the Walgett AMS in December 1999 when an ICEE optometrist visited for a one day clinic.
- Seven AMSs provided with funds to purchase eye clinic equipment
- Seven Aboriginal Eye Health Coordinators provided with training
- Through collaboration and cooperation the programme now regularly conducts eye clinics at 98 locations throughout NSW.



- In 2008-2009 the total number of patients examined and supplied with spectacles by the ICEE/ Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) NSW Aboriginal Eye Care Programme was 3500 bringing the total number since the Programme's inception to in excess of 20 000.
- In excess of 3000 optical appliances were made available to Aboriginal people at no cost.
 - 10% of these patients were referred to another healthcare practitioner;
 - 16% were diagnosed diabetics and now receive regular eye examinations in accordance with the AHMRC.
 - 15% of the diagnosed diabetics showed some signs of diabetic retinopathy.

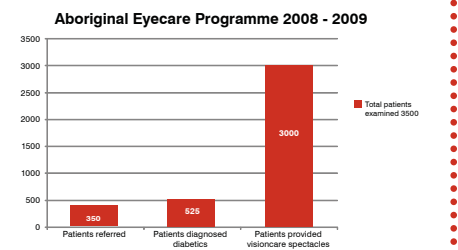


FIGURE 2: NSW Aboriginal Eyecare Programme 2008 -2009

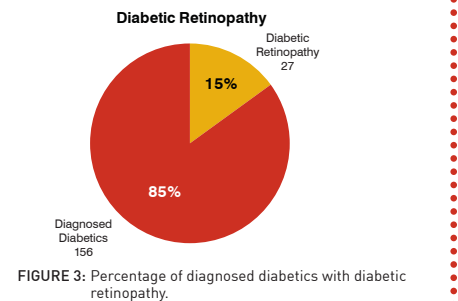


FIGURE 3: Percentage of diagnosed diabetics with diabetic retinopathy.

PARTNERS

- ICEE – International Centre for Eyecare Education
- AHMRC – Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council
- OATSIH – Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
- AMS – Aboriginal Medical Services
- Local Aboriginal communities
- Visioncare NSW – Governments' spectacle programme
- RFDS - Royal Flying Doctor Service
- NSW Government's Rural Aerial Health Service
- Optometrists

These partners work collaboratively to provide a culturally appropriate and sustainable eye care service for Aboriginal people within Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Facilities in NSW.

CONCLUSION

The ICEE Aboriginal Eyecare Programme in collaboration with others continues to increasingly provide culturally appropriate and easily accessible eye care services within Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Facilities.

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