



Australian Society of Ophthalmologists

MEDIA RELEASE

Australian Society of Ophthalmologists Incorporated ABN 29 454 001 424

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OPHTHALMOLOGISTS COMMITTED TO REMOTE AND INDIGENOUS EYE HEALTH

Eye specialists throughout the country are anticipating the immediate commencement of a national co-ordination of outreach eye services.

The *Coordination of Ophthalmologists' Outreach Eye Services* is an initiative that was spearheaded by the Australian Society of Ophthalmologists (ASO) in 2009. It was finalised in the form of an Agreement between the ASO and the Federal Government in February 2010.

Through an enhancement of existing eye health networks, the initiative is set to assist in the growth and improvement of eye services for Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians living in remote parts of the country.

The ASO's desire to introduce the *Coordination of Ophthalmologists' Outreach Eye Services* supports the findings of the Melbourne School of Population Health report *Provision of Indigenous Eye Health Services* (Report).

The Report has highlighted and underscored the key issues of coordination and access which ophthalmologists have long been aware of.

ASO spokesman Dr Bill Glasson said he was extremely proud of the work and achievements of the many ophthalmologists working in Indigenous and remote areas during the past three to four decades, commencing with the outstanding commitment of Professor Fred Hollows.

"There are many eye specialists continuing to provide eye care to indigenous communities as well as to many remote locations across Australia," Dr Glasson said.

"These ophthalmologists do need assistance to ensure that the take-up of these visits and services to Indigenous Australians is higher and that the coordination is more efficient," he said.

Dr Glasson said a recent survey of all Australian ophthalmologists conducted by the ASO had found more than 50% of those who provided Outreach Services to Indigenous and Remote Communities had never been contacted by any health authority in relation to the services they provide.

"Indeed in my case I have to do all the planning for my visits," Dr Glasson, who conducts eye clinics in far western Queensland (from Longreach to Birdsville) each year, said.

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“This is onerous. I believe that myself, and indeed all ophthalmologists, could achieve more if there was better ongoing coordination of our efforts across Australia,” he said.

The ASO is hopeful the Federal Government support it achieved through lobbying on the cataract rebate issue earlier this year will prove to be a major win on access to vital eye services for both Indigenous and other Australians in remote areas.

This agreement resulted in the Federal Government committing \$5 million over the next four years to help grow and better coordinate the ophthalmologists’ eye health services to remote and indigenous Australians. This clearly complements and completes the \$6.5 million optometrists’ remote and indigenous initiative announced yesterday by the Hon Warren Snowdon Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Services Delivery.

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