



FIRST NATIONS  
EYE HEALTH ALLIANCE

First Nations Workshop Report

## **Taking Action:**

Prioritising key activities to  
improve Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islanders eye health  
and vision care in Australia

2023 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference  
on Dharug Country, Sydney NSW

**Published March 2024**







## **Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work and live across Australia and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. We pay respects to our elder's past, present and emerging. We thank our elders for their guidance and commitment to the advancement of our communities. We stand in solidarity with the stolen generation and their families, calling for healing and justice for the atrocities suffered by individuals, families, and communities.

We also acknowledge the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that have or continue to work tirelessly in eye health and vision care, to close the gap in preventable vision loss in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities so they can be well and flourishing.

We acknowledge and thank the Dharug people of Parramatta, Sydney, New South Wales for welcoming us and allowing us to meet on their land for this workshop.

## **Acknowledgement of Key Knowledge Holders**

We would like to thank the over 80 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants that attended and provided their input to the workshop session. The First Nations Eye Health Alliance commits to integrating these insights and thoughts garnered from this workshop to building out key activities that strengthen the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people nationally.

Workshop facilitated by Mr. Shaun Tatipata (Ngarrindjeri/Wuthathi), Mr. Nick Wilson (Ngarrindjeri) and Mrs. Lose (Rose) Fonua (Tubba-Gah, Wiradjuri). The preliminary data synthesis and report is collated and written by Mrs Lose (Rose) Fonua. The fuller data synthesis provided by Dr Guy Gillor. Report edited by Mrs. Lose Fonua, Mr. Shaun Tatipata and Mel Pouvalu (Wiradjuri).

## **The First Nations Eye Health Alliance is committed to reduction of inequalities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.**

The Alliance is committed to the full implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart- Voice, Treaty and Truth. We continue to call for health equity, justice and to upholding the rights and voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so that our communities are healthy and thriving.

### **The First Nations Eye Health Alliance Logo**

Designed by contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artist Dennis Golding (Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay), the artwork and logo speak of contemporary and traditional pathways that support healing and wellbeing in our communities. The artwork and logo acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia and how we connect with to one another through these pathways as one people. More information on our logo and the artist can be found here: <https://fneha.com.au/branding>.

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The information in the report represents the thoughts of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Professionals that attended the First Nations Workshop at the 2023 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference, Dharug Land, Sydney on 22nd of May 2024.

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## **Introduction to the First Nations Eye Health Alliance (FNEHA)**

The First Nations Eye Health Alliance (The Alliance) is a national peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporation. that represents advocates and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision care workforce in the health system. This also includes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Services.

The Alliance aims to stop preventable vision loss and blindness in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We are committed to seeing all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people healthy and thriving. We aim to work together utilising traditional and contemporary knowledges and pathways to strengthen health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities so that they are healthy and flourishing.

The Alliance has an established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board that consists of well-known and established leaders in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and eye health sectors. These Board members come from a multidisciplinary membership base that work in primary, secondary and tertiary health care structures in the Australian Health care system. More information pertaining to our board can be found on our website at [www.fneha.com.au](http://www.fneha.com.au)

## **How the Alliance was formed**

The Alliance originated out of key discussions at the 2022 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference on Larrakia Country, Darwin, NT. At this meeting, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals from across the country called for a dedicated body to lead the advancements needed to improve eye health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Key findings from these discussions are captured in the Vision 2030 Report which can be found here [www.fneha.com.au](http://www.fneha.com.au)

This request was further reiterated again at the 2023 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference Dharug Country, Sydney NSW May 2023. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals who attended the workshop further emphasized and confirmed the need for an incorporated peak body that would represent the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Professionals committed to improving eye health outcomes for their communities. This resulted in The Alliance creation and incorporation on the 18th of July 2023.

For more information on The Alliance, please contact us via [heyyoumob@fneha.com.au](mailto:heyyoumob@fneha.com.au)

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# 1. Executive Summary

## Background

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience blindness and vision loss at a rate three times of non-Indigenous Australians. (National Eye Health Survey, 2015) Although gains have been made in some areas, there are still higher numbers of preventable vision loss and blindness affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when compared to non-Indigenous Australians. (AIHW, 2023)

With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population estimates set to reach one million by the year 2030, without commitment on behalf of government and the health sector, the gap in eye health and vision care in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will continue into 2030. (Gillor & Anjou, 2022) Proactive approaches are needed to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long lives, are healthy and thriving.

## The 2023 First Nations Workshop

The First Nations Eye Health Alliance held a workshop at the 2023 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference on Dharug Country, on the 24th of May 2023. There were two aims of this workshop.

The first aim of the workshop was to map key definitions and protective factors, enablers of eye health prevention across the life course in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities from a First Nations eye health and vision care professional perspective. The second aim was to develop key actions that The Alliance would lead to strengthen the eye health and vision care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The report details the feedback received from the participants and highlights key recommendations and considerations moving forward.



Delegates at the 2023 First Nations Workshop

## Summary Findings

The workshop provided key insights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and views that will contextualise future directions of eye health and vision care work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The definitions, principles and values identified from this workshop advocate for greater cultural capability of the Australian Health Care system as a necessary change to build healthy and well Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the life course.

The workshop also highlighted key actions for the sector, led by The Alliance, that if enacted would build culturally safe and accessible services and workforce, that would strengthen eye health and vision care outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Therefore, the key recommendations of this report include:

## **1.1 Celebrate the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by ensuring cultural knowledge and cultural principles are made central to the delivery of equitable eye health services in communities.**

**1.1.1** Recognising and celebrating the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their inherent strength, value, and desire to drive health changes in their communities is a critical process. Privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and their respective representative organisations is the key to developing service models and delivery modalities, that will support sustainable systems that stop preventable vision loss and blindness in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

**1.1.2** To close the gap in vision, the sector needs the development of a culturally safe and responsive Australian health care system that is high quality, geographically and financially accessible, free from racism, strengthened by a sustainably resourced and skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and supported by a culturally informed and responsive non-Indigenous workforce. The Australian Government is urged to invest in cultural capability of the non-Indigenous workforce and the Australian health system, by financially investing in The Alliance to develop and deliver cultural capability and responsiveness training for the eye health and vision care sector.

**1.1.3** Funding commitments to build sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community led models of care is necessary, along with a commitment to build evidence-based systems approaches that privilege Indigenous data sovereignty.

## **1.2. Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander preventative eye health and vision care activities nationally.**

**1.2.1** Strong financial investment and partnership agreements with Australian Government and key sector stakeholders are required to prioritise the delivery of preventative health focused eye health and vision care activities in the sector. By increasing access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to early detection and intervention services, it will offset the future risk of poor eye health and vision care outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

**1.2.2** Preventative health activities focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are a priority for funding and action to ensure children thrive in their early years.

**1.2.3** Finally, additional funding is needed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led research that will investigate the generational and life course impacts of eye health and vision care problems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Priority research is also needed to investigate the life course impacts for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with low vision and blindness.

## Summary Findings (continued)

### **1.3 Invest in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led nationally coordinated education and training pathway, that will lift the capability of First Nations eye health and vision care workforce.**

**1.3.1** Greater investment to support a nationally coordinated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision care educational and training approach is needed to address current and future workforce and service shortages.

**1.3.2** Led by The Alliance and delivered in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander registered training organisations, the approach would include the development of a nationally coordinated and training and education pathway that will create easy pathways navigation into eye health and vision care professions and careers. It will also provide up-to-date resources that will be culturally appropriate, and strengths based.

**1.3.3** Combined these approaches will lead to a significant increase in local community staffing positions that will strengthen the capability of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled health services to deliver more effective eye health and vision care services for their communities.

### **1.4 Invest in building resilient and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision care services.**

**1.4.1** Greater investment is needed in the creation of sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce positions, that build the capability of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services to deliver Eye health and vision care services to reach population parity for eye health and vision care services. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services are holistic, culturally appropriate and best placed to deliver this work. The Australian government and respective health care agencies are encouraged to work with The Alliance to transition workforce funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to deliver the capacity uplift for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision care services nationally.

**1.4.2** The Australian Government, Eye Health agencies and other health allies, are encouraged to engage in a true spirit of reciprocity and commit to, transitioning in the next 3-5 of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander funded eye health and vision care health programs, activities, and services, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community control and where possible, Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations.



## 2. Workshop Report

### Background

#### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health picture demonstrates inequity and disadvantage.**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience blindness and vision loss at a rate three times of non-Indigenous Australians. (National Eye Health Survey, 2015) Although gains have been made in some areas, there are still higher numbers of preventable vision loss and blindness occurring within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the areas of trachoma, cataracts, and diabetic retinopathy for example, when compared to non-Indigenous Australians. (AIHW, 2023)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience significantly greater health inequities in comparison to non-Indigenous people within Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women have a lower life expectancy of are about 8 years to 9 years when compared to Non-Indigenous Australians. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023) Chronic diseases are responsible for more than two thirds (70%) of the total healthcare and 64% of the total disease burden among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with most of these disease groups preventable. (National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, 2023) Aboriginal and Torres Strait of the people as a whole have lost almost 240,000 years of healthy life due to ill health and premature death which is the equivalent of 289 years for every 1000 people. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023)

The future projections around eye health and vision care in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, highlight continued eye health inequities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into the year 2030. With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population estimates projected to reach 1 million by the year 2030, it is estimated that the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island eye health and vision care will remain. Proactive approaches are needed now to ensure the system can scale to meet population-based needs and to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long lives, are healthy and thriving. (Gillor & Anjou, 2022) Innovative, culturally safe, and self-determined approaches are needed, led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and supported by our allies, to achieve eye health and vision care equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



The launch of the Vision 2030 Report with Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy

#### **The 2023 First Nations Workshop Background**

The workshop was held on the land of the Dharug people at the 2023 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference, Novotel Parramatta, Sydney NSW.

This workshop is built on concepts identified in the previous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health workshop held on Larrika Country, at the 2022 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference, Darwin NT. The outcomes from the 2022 workshop are detailed in The Vision 2030 report found online here: [The Vision 2030 Report](#)

The primary aim of the workshop was to map key definitions and protective factors, enablers of eye health prevention across the life course in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities from a First Nations eye health and vision care professional perspective.

The second aim was to utilise a whole of life preventative health perspective to develop key actions that The Alliance would lead to strengthen the eye health and vision care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The report details the feedback received from the participants and highlights key recommendations and considerations moving forward.

## 3. Appendix Workshop Agenda

Time	Agenda Item
<b>2pm</b>	Welcome
<b>2:05pm</b>	Acknowledgement
<b>2:10pm</b>	Introduction to Nick Wilson, Shaun Tatipata and Lose (Rose) Fonua
<b>2:15pm</b>	Outline of the day (Shaun Tatipata)
<b>2:20pm</b>	Vision 2030 Report - Key Findings (Shaun Tatipata)
<b>2:30pm</b>	Session 1 - Group Activity Question 1: What is the definition of prevention for First Nations eye health? Question 2: What are the elements that would contribute to prevention across the life course? Question 3: What values should guide us in this work? Through and indigenous lens, it is about forming our position on this and thinking through how to carry that forward?
<b>2:50pm</b>	Regroup and Integrated Thinking
<b>3pm</b>	Afternoon Tea
<b>3pm</b>	Recap
<b>3:05pm</b>	Session 2 - Group Activity Utilising some of the thinking from today along with the Vision 2030 report, map out key actions and outcomes are needed to strengthening eye health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
<b>3:25pm</b>	Recap
<b>3:45pm</b>	Session 3 - Integration and Prioritisation Question: Where should we focus our efforts and what should we focus on first?
<b>4:40pm</b>	Recap and Wrap-up
<b>5pm</b>	Workshop End



Delegates at the 2023 First Nations Workshop

# 4. Workshop Transcript

## Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country

Mr. Shaun Tatipata welcomed the conference participants to the First Nations only workshop. Shaun acknowledged the traditional custodians of the land in which we were meeting, the Dharug people, and acknowledged their elder's past, present and emerging. Shaun also paid respect to the First Nations members in the room.

## Introductions

Mr. Shaun Tatipata introduced himself and Mr. Nick Wilson and Mrs. Lose (Rose) Fonua who were identified as running the First Nations workshop. today. Shaun provided a basic introduction and outline of the workshop for the afternoon. The workshop included three sessions that inquired and queried the following:

- Mapping out the thoughts on what prevention in First Nations Eye health and vision care could and should look like across the life course.
- What elements would contribute to achieving this?
- What values would guide the broader sector on this work.

The workshop participants were also introduced to the concept of examining the key areas for action that The Alliance would focus on that would strengthen the Eye health and vision care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The group attending the workshop were more than 80 different multidisciplinary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals, working in or had interest in eye health and vision care working at a local, state, and national level. Interestingly only about 10% present at the workshop had attended the First Nations workshop the year previously.

An undertaking was made to these workshop participants that the key findings would be published in a report from The Alliance. Members were offered the option to be identified in this report by scanning the QR code on their desks and registering their name, organisation, and position. The group was also informed that they would be contacted post workshop to provide feedback on the write up of the report to ensure it was a true and accurate representation of the session work and responses. Mr Shaun Tatipata introduced the work by outlining the 2022 First Nations National and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Workshop and its key findings found in the Vision 2030 report.

## Summary of the 2022 Vision 2030 Report

In 2022, on Larrakia country in Darwin Northern Territory over 60 First Nations Eye health and vision care professionals came together at the First Nations workshop for The 2022 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health conference to discuss what the future of eye health and vision care is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities from the perspective of multidisciplinary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals working in eye health and vision care workers at local state and national level.

The group was facilitated by a Professor Sohail Inayatullah who utilised strategic foresight and future thinking questions, to take the participants through an exercise of designing a combined First Nations Eye health and vision care that would lead to an improvement in eye health outcomes for First Nations communities in Australia.

Doctor Guy Gillor and Associate Professor Mitchell Anjou, Indigenous Eye Health Unit, ONEMDA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Wellbeing, provided a crude assessment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision care services into 2030. The crude assessment revealed that found that the at the year 2030 that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision care will still not achieve population parity.

With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population estimates projected to reach 1 million by the year 2030, the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island eye health and vision care. Without drastic rethink of the scale up of the system, in the year 2030 the Australian health care system would continue to have inadequate workforce and services to provide care needed for these communities. (Gillor & Anjou, 2022)

The data modelling also highlighted limited increases in the uptake of eye health checks, diabetic eye examinations and diabetic retinopathy treatment. It also showed low representation of focussed eye health trained workforce and even lower representation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce by 2030.

Utilising this information, the participants from the workshop went through and brainstormed activities and structures that can be set up to strengthen eye health and vision care services for their communities into 2030. The findings of the workshop and key recommendations included:

- The development of health education for communities needs to be developed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait children would receive comprehensive eye checks,
- Access to eye care would be available for all First Nations people regardless of where they live
- Eye care services are patient centred utilising technology to expedite screening and treatment producing better outcomes
- The group also talked about housing being fit for purpose for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their families
- That there would be an increase in the capabilities of our communities where there is greater representation of Eye Health workforce that are First Nations people, that all communities and their inherent values are harnessed, realised, and utilised to advance health outcomes for the communities.
- Finally, one of the critical recommendations of the group was the need to setup a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye health and vision care peak body, that would lead the reforms needed to support and strengthen communities to succeed in their aspirations around eye health and vision care delivery.



Delegates at the 2023  
First Nations Workshop  
*Photo supplied by The Indigenous  
Eye Health Unit (IEHU)*

The group expressed three critical next step processes that would support building success in these areas:

- The formation of the national First Nations Peak in Eye health and vision care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This group would provide sector leadership for First Nations Eye Health by elevating the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and lead the changes needed to strengthen outcomes for their communities.
- Focus on a strengths-based prevention approach that promoted good health and well-being included through routine screening and adequate clinical care
- Taking action on identified priority groups: children and people living with diabetes.
- And finally, the group identified the need for a national eye health data set that could demonstrate the need for scaling services for the growing population as well as build data pictures of the true impact of eye health and vision care services in communities.

### **The 2023 Workshop Aims**

The 2023 workshop attendees then pivoted to focus on the two questions for discussion at the 2023 workshop.

The first set of questions would focus on mapping the key definitions and protective factors, enablers of eye health and prevention across the life course, in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities from a First Nations eye health and vision care professional perspective.

The second activity would include developing key actions that The Alliance would lead to strengthen the eye health and vision care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## Session 1 Group Activity

Mr. Shaun Tatipata introduced the first group activity session that would answer the first three (3) key questions discussing prevention in eye health and vision care for First Nations communities. Working in groups the workshop participants brainstormed and presented back to the group with their answers to these questions. A summary of the answers to these questions are listed below.

### **Results for Question 1: What is the definition of prevention for First Nations eye health?**

According to participants, the definition of prevention in First Nations eye health includes:

- Following accepted cultural principles to ensure culturally safe practice.
- Access to effective services, and the required systems improvement needed to achieve those.
- Education of eye care for patients and service providers.
- And allowing for early detection and early intervention when required.

From the responses, participants define prevention in First Nations eye health as holistic in its approach and scope. Prevention work must be firmly rooted in accepted cultural principles, which vary across places and nations, and it can only exist if the overall health service provision is culturally safe and effective, allowing for early detection and intervention when required. Education is highly regarded by participants as key towards prevention as well and underpins all other elements mentioned.

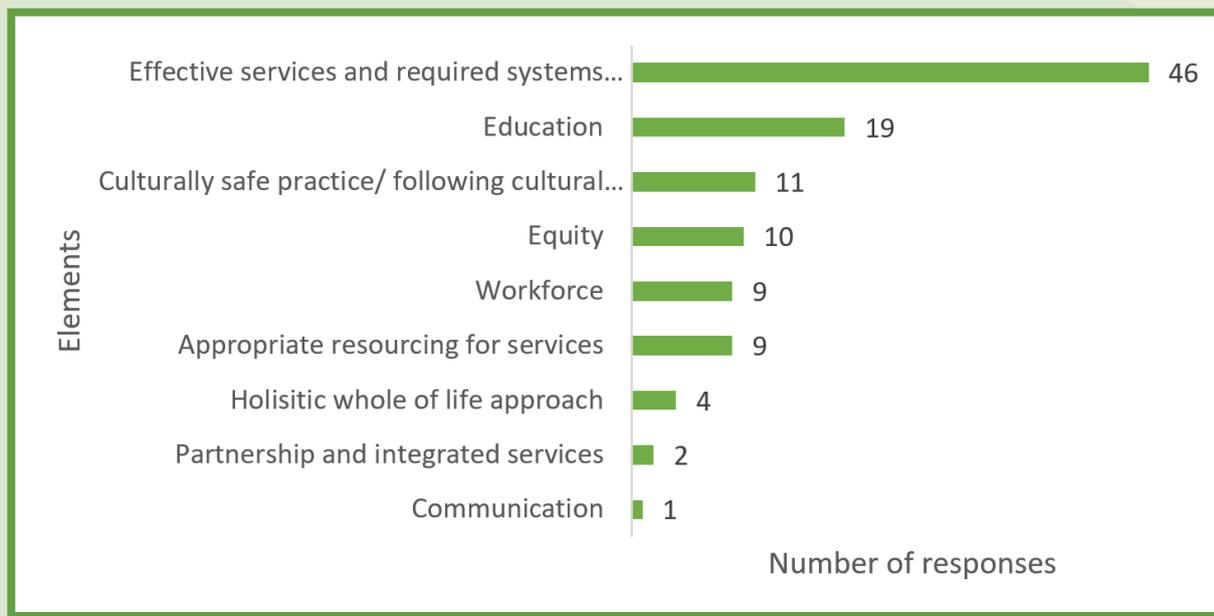
**Figure 1: Summary of the group definitions of what prevention is in First Nations eye health**



### Results for Question 2: What are the elements that would contribute to prevention across the life course?

According to participants, the key element that would contribute to prevention across the life course is effective services and required systems improvements to ensure effective services. Other elements that contribute to prevention across the life course, according to participants, are education, culturally safe practice following cultural principles, and equity.

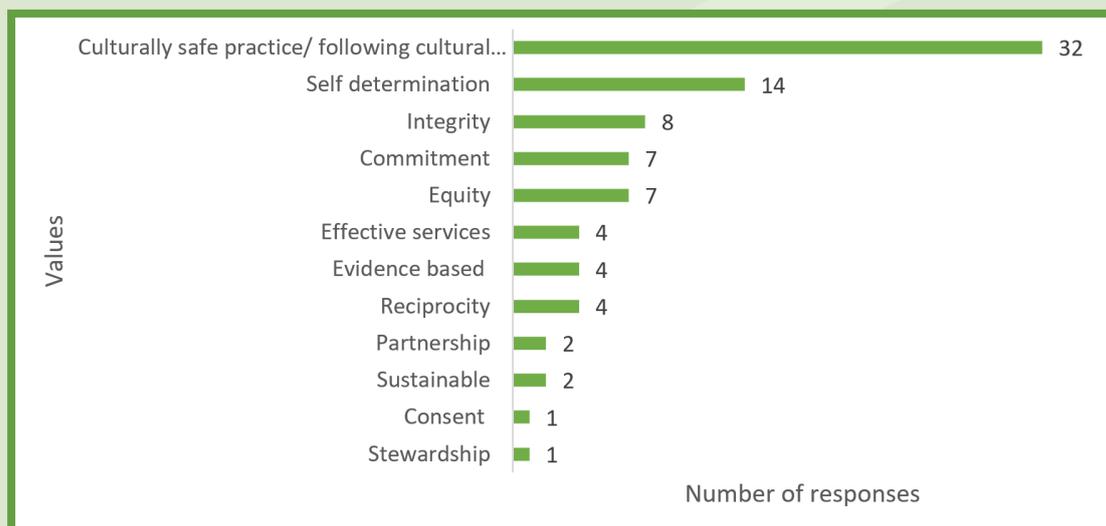
Figure 2: Summary of the elements that would contribute to First Nations Eye health prevention across the life course.



### Results for Question 3: What values should guide us in this work?

Participants called to center this work around culturally safe practices and follow cultural principles in the process. This is central to any prevention work, in eye care, in health care, and beyond. Self-determination was the next common theme and is interlinked as self-determination is a prerequisite for appropriate cultural safety. Integrity, commitment, and equity are the other most mentioned themes that should guide our work, according to participants.

Figure 3: Summary of the values that First Nations members believe is important to guide the work being completed in this space.



The group was thanked for their participation and progressed to a break.

## Session 2 Group Activity

Mr Nick Wilson introduced the next group activity which focused on nominating what key actions The Alliance could progress to improve the eye health and vision care in First nations communities.

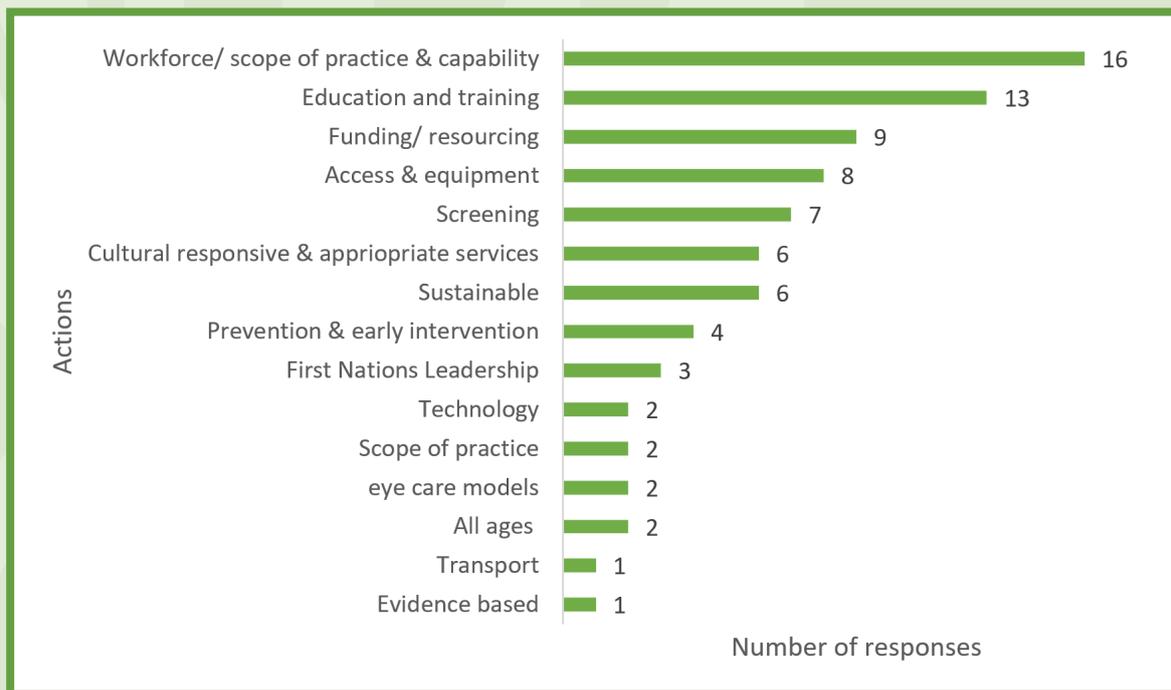
Expanding on some of the thoughts outlined from the 2022 Vision 2030 workshop report, the group discussed and mapped actions to the following question: Utilising some of the vision 2030 findings combined with your experience, map out key actions and outcomes that are needed to strengthen eye health outcomes in First Nations communities.

The group were given access to the vision 2030 report via email to resource the discussion.

### Results for Question 4: Identifying key actions

Working table by table the workshop participants commenced brainstorming answers to the question. Figure 4 outlines the summary of key priority actions in First Nations eye health and vision care.

Figure 4: Summary of key priority actions in First Nations eye health and vision care





First Nations Workshop participants determining future priorities  
Photo supplied by The Indigenous Eye Health Unit (IEHU)

The feedback session included robust discussion around key areas for action to improve the Eye health and vision care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. These themes for focus included:

### **Research led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

A key research theme that arose from consultations included the need to draw out understanding on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are different to Non-Indigenous Australians. The group also highlighted the need to investigate the outcomes of generational impacts of First nations eye health and vision care problems. And finally, the need to understand the life course impacts for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with low vision and blindness.

### **Funding**

The need for consistent funding that is built on evidence based, best practice and financially sustainable eye health and vision care models is critical. Advocacy was identified as an essential step to strengthening models of care that can be delivered with a long-term goal of create financially self-sufficient eye health services in First Nations communities.

### **Systems Reform**

The importance of expanding the national spectacle scheme to include free, no gap glasses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people nationally was identified as a key area for reform. Additionally expanding preventive bulk billed eye health care services combined with the inclusion of mandatory eye health screening as part MBS item 715, were changes suggested to support early detection and intervention. A fundamental area for reform included a systems wide recognition of the leadership mechanism chose to support this work, the Alliance as the peak body taking carriage of this work into the future. In recognising the importance of this strong self-determined leadership mechanism, the system celebrates self-determined communities and acknowledge the importance of community control in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.

## ***Prevention***

Early detection and intervention were identified as key activities to reduce preventable vision loss and blindness in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Building the health literacy of communities through structured health education (with key focus on young people) and health promotion by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Health professionals at key events and through social marketing were considered avenues to progress change. The facilitation of preventative eye health screening and health assessments for all ages were also identified as critical for early detection and early treatment. Finally, the importance of increasing access to affordable and timely specialist care or services was identified as important to building equitable access to necessary treatment when needed.

## ***Resourcing***

Building affordable and accessible community transport models to support patients attending health appointments was highlighted as a need. Resourcing and equipping local workforce with the required modern eye health and vision care technology was recommended to reduce geographical barriers to services and strengthen the capability of local service delivery.



## ***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce***

Strengthening workforce through the delivery of training and education approaches were highlighted as essential to build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce. Recommendations also included building culturally safe educational environments where accurate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history is taught and where barriers to education (e.g. finances) are remedied.

Providing greater visibility of educational pathways into eye health professions were recommended to build workforce. Finally, providing critical operational practice information that provided greater understanding of critical services and funding models (e.g. explaining billing pathways through the Medicare benefits scheme) were needed to be shared routinely for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and the services in which they work

A final recommendation included increasing dedicated or specialised roles to address the generational impacts of poor health in these communities.

## ***Building a culturally responsive non-Indigenous workforce***

The provision of appropriate cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous workforce is needed to build a culturally responsive workforce with awareness and willingness to provide culturally safe spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



2023 First Nations Workshop Facilitator, Mr Shaun Tatipata  
Photo supplied by The Indigenous Eye Health Unit (IEHU)

## **Results Question 5: Prioritisation**

Mr Nick Wilson then took the group through an activity of prioritisation to devise the top three key actions nominated by the workshop participants. The Alliance could then take these actions and progress them in the capacity as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Peak.

The identified actions were summarised thematically and placed around the room on white boards. Each workshop participant was provided with three votes to place against their preferred actions.

The top three actions identified by the participants included:

- Workforce: developing an approach that strengthened capability, increased scope of practice and built future capacity in eye health pathways.
- The need for strengthened culturally responsive education and training for the sector and skilled capability focused training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision care professionals currently working in the space and those that are interested in entering the pathway.
- And finally, the need for adequate and sustained funding and resourcing for eye health and vision care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## **Next steps**

Mr Shaun Tatipata wrapped up the session talking through the next steps beyond the workshop. Shaun confirmed that the findings from the workshop would be synthesised and written up in a report. Dissemination of this report would be fed back through The Alliance membership. As a final action of the workshop, all members were reminded to register their details with the QR code available on the desk if they wished for their names to be included in the report. All participants were thanked for their participation in this activity.

# 6. Key Recommendations

The workshop provided key insights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and views that will contextualise future directions of eye health and vision care work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The definitions, principles and values identified from this workshop advocate for greater cultural capability of the Australian Health Care system as a necessary change to build healthy and well Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the life course.

The workshop also highlighted key actions for the sector, led by The Alliance, that if enacted would build culturally safe and accessible services and workforce, that would strengthen eye health and vision care outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Therefore, the key recommendations of this report include:

## **1. Celebrate the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by ensuring cultural knowledge and cultural principles are made central to the delivery of equitable eye health services in communities.**

1.1 Recognising and celebrating the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their inherent strength, value, and desire to drive health changes in their communities is a critical process. Privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and their respective representative organisations is the key to developing service models and delivery modalities, that will support sustainable systems that stop preventable vision loss and blindness in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

1.2 To close the gap in vision, the sector needs the development of a culturally safe and responsive Australian health care system that is high quality, geographically and financially accessible, free from racism, strengthened by a sustainably resourced and skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and supported by a culturally informed and responsive non-Indigenous workforce.

1.3 Funding commitments to build sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community led models of care is necessary, along with a commitment to build evidence-based systems approaches that privilege Indigenous data sovereignty.

## **2. Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander preventative eye health and vision care activities nationally.**

2.1 Strong financial investment and partnership agreements with Australian Government and key sector stakeholders are required to prioritise the delivery of preventative health focused eye health and vision care activities in the sector. By increasing access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to early detection and intervention services, it will offset the future risk of poor eye health and vision care outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

2.2 Preventative health activities focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are a priority for funding and action to ensure children thrive in their early years.

2.3 Finally, additional funding is needed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led research that will investigate the generational and life course impacts of eye health and vision care problems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Priority research is also needed to investigate the life course impacts for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with low vision and blindness.

### **3. Invest in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led nationally coordinated education and training pathway, that will lift the capability of First Nations eye health and vision care workforce.**

3.1 Greater investment to support a nationally coordinated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision care educational and training approach is needed to address current and future workforce and service shortages.

3.2 Led by The Alliance and delivered in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander registered training organisations, the approach would include the development of a nationally coordinated and training and education pathway that will create easy pathways navigation into eye health and vision care professions and careers. It will also provide up-to-date resources that will be culturally appropriate, and strengths based.

3.3 Combined these approaches will lead to a significant increase in local community staffing positions that will strengthen the capability of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled health services to deliver more effective eye health and vision care services for their communities.

### **4. Invest in building resilient and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision care services.**

4.1 Greater investment is needed in the creation of sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce positions, that build the capability of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services to deliver Eye health and vision care services to reach population parity for eye health and vision care services. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services are holistic, culturally appropriate and best placed to deliver this work. The Australian government and respective health care agencies are encouraged to work with The Alliance to transition workforce funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community control to deliver the capacity uplift for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision care services nationally.

4.2 The Australian Government, Eye Health agencies and other health allies, are encouraged to engage in a true spirit of reciprocity and commit to, transitioning in the next 3-5 of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander funded eye health and vision care health programs, activities, and services, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community control and where possible, Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations.

## 6. References

- 1.** Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023, July 6). Life expectancy. AIHW Indigenous HPF. <https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/Report-overview/Overview/Summary-Report/4-Tier-1-%E2%80%93-Health-status-and-outcomes/Life-expectancy>
- 2.** NACCHO. (2019). NACCHO Key Facts (NACCHO, Ed.) [Review of NACCHO Key Facts]. [https://www.naccho.org.au/app/uploads/2022/11/NACCHO\\_KeyFacts\\_infographics\\_A4\\_221115.pdf](https://www.naccho.org.au/app/uploads/2022/11/NACCHO_KeyFacts_infographics_A4_221115.pdf)
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Delegates of the 2023 National Aboriginal and  
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