

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EYE HEALTH CONFERENCE 2026

SEEING OUR WAY

Innovation, Excellence & Healing

11 - 13 MAY 2026 | Naarm/Melbourne – Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Country

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

FINAL PROGRAM

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands, skies, and waterways throughout Australia. We acknowledge the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the land and affirm 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.

Finally, we acknowledge the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who 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 healthy and flourishing.

LOCATION

We gather on the beautiful lands of the Wurundjeri People at The Melbourne Cricket Ground, Brunton Ave, Richmond VIC 3002, Australia

DISCLAIMER

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this program and other Conference resources may contain images and voices of deceased persons.

ARTWORK

'Connecting Land, Sky and Water', created by contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artist Dennis Golding expresses Aboriginal peoples connection to land, sky and water since time immemorial. Our history shows how our people have cared for Country including the waterways and land that provides us sources for life and culture. This artwork recognises how the First Nations Eye Health Alliance aim to provide pathways, support and care into our community for better outcomes in health and wellbeing. It acknowledges how communities who come from all parts of country including salter water, freshwater regions, to connect and work together as one. The artwork allows people to see the roots of Country, the cultural practices on land, the tracks we mark, the waters we live off and around, and the stories we reflect and connect to from sky Country.

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The Fred Hollows
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CONFERENCE COVENOR



Dear Delegates, Partners, and Friends,

Welcome to the 2026 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference.

This year marks a significant milestone, 10 years of coming together as a sector committed to improving eye health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Over the past decade, this conference has grown into a powerful platform for connection, knowledge sharing, and collective action, grounded in the strength of community and the leadership of our people.

NATSIEHC26 continues this legacy, bringing together an exceptional line-up of speakers, including leaders, clinicians, researchers, and community who are driving innovation and change across eye health. We are incredibly proud to stand alongside such a diverse and committed group, united by a shared purpose: to strengthen systems, elevate community-led solutions, and improve outcomes for our Mob.

This conference reflects the progress we have made together and the work that lies ahead. It is a space where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are centred, where partnerships are strengthened, and where we continue to advocate for a future free from avoidable vision loss and blindness.

At the First Nations Eye Health Alliance (FNEHA), we are proud to walk alongside you, your partners, colleagues, and communities in this work. Together, we represent a strong, unified voice for change, grounded in culture, respect, and self-determination.

Thankyou to our Gold Sponsor, Roche Australia, our Silver Sponsor, The Fred Hollows Foundation, and to all our sponsors for making this event possible.

Thankyou all for being part of this journey and for your ongoing commitment to improving eye health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Warm regards,



Lose (Rose) Fonua
Chief Executive Officer
The First Nations Eye Health Alliance Limited





Dear Delegates, Colleagues, and Friends,

On behalf of the First Nations Eye Health Alliance (FNEHA) Board, it is my great honour to welcome you to the 2026 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference (NATSIEHC26).

As we gather for the 10th anniversary of NATSIEHC, we reflect on a decade of advocacy, leadership, partnership and collective action across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health sector.

What began as a determined movement to strengthen First Nations voices in eye health has grown into a national platform for connection, collaboration, self-determination and systems change.

Over the past 10 years, our sector has achieved significant milestones , strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, growing our workforce, advancing culturally safe and community-led models of care, and continuing to advocate for equitable access to eye health and vision care for our peoples and communities.

This conference is an opportunity to celebrate those achievements and acknowledge every Elder, community member, health worker, clinician, researcher, organisation and ally who has walked alongside us on this journey. Your commitment continues to shape a stronger future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health.

As we look ahead, we remain focused on building a sector grounded in community voice, accountability, cultural strength and equity. Together, we continue working toward a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can access culturally safe, coordinated and high-quality eye care, free from avoidable vision loss and blindness.

Thank you for being part of this journey and for contributing to the collective vision we continue to build together — Our Vision, Our Way.

Warm regards,

Shaun Tatipata
Co-Chair, First Nations Eye Health Alliance

WELCOME RECEPTION

Welcome Reception

🕒 Monday 11th May 11.30 am - 12.30 pm

📍 Near the Scar Tree, Opposite Gate 4, Yarra Parklands, Melbourne Cricket Ground

Join us for the Welcome Reception at MCG Parklands. The Djirri Djirri Dance Cultural Services will perform and deliver a Welcome to Country, Smoking Ceremony and cultural dancing to open the event.



Djirri Djirri Dance Group

Djirri Djirri are the only Wurundjeri female dance group, and are Traditional Custodians of Narm (Melbourne) and surrounds. Djirri Djirri means Willy Wagtail in Woiwurrung, our Mother Tongue. The Willy Wagtail is the Spirit's Messenger and gave us dance! Our dances honour our Liwik (Ancestors), Kerr-up-non (Family), Biik (Country) and animals. We are all connected by blood through one woman, Borate, Berak's (William Barak's) sister. We ngarrga (dance) and yinga (sing) together as bininang (cousins), babi (nieces), girrin (aunties), baban (mothers), manggip (daughters), liwurruk (sisters) and bubup (babies).



GALA DINNER AND AWARDS

🕒 Tuesday 12th May 6:30 pm – 9:30 pm

📍 Members Dining Room, Melbourne Cricket Ground

Join us for an evening of celebration, connection and culture at the NATSIEHC26 Conference Dinner, commemorating 10 years of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference.

Held in the iconic Members Dining Room at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), the evening will bring together delegates, partners and leaders from across the sector to reflect on a decade of advocacy, collaboration and progress in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health.

Guests will enjoy exceptional food, entertainment and storytelling, with live performances from acclaimed First Nations artists The Deans and KAYBEE, whose soulful sounds and dynamic performances promise a memorable evening of celebration and connection.

Pre-dinner cocktails will commence from 6:30 pm, with the formal program beginning promptly at 7:00 pm.

We look forward to celebrating this special milestone with you.



The Deans

The Deans are a musical force to be reckoned with.

Renowned as one of the leading original soul bands, they deliver a fresh, modern sound with a dynamic blend of old-school soul, funk, rocksteady, and rhythm & blues, guaranteed to have you on your feet and grooving all night.

Kaybee

A Melbourne-based First Nations artist bringing soulful, contemporary R&B with strong funk influences. Born in Cairns and raised in Mossman, KAYBEE proudly identifies as Kuku Yalanji, Gubbi Gubbi, and Goreng Goreng, weaving cultural depth and authenticity into every performance.

With powerful vocals and expressive guitar work, KAYBEE captivates audiences whether performing solo, as a duo, or with a full band.



KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Abe Ropitini, Executive Director, Population Health, The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)

Abe Ropitini is a Māori and Aboriginal man of Ngāti Kahungunu and Ngāti Maniapoto iwi (Aotearoa) and Trawlwoolway (Northeastern Tasmania) descent. After growing up in Aotearoa, he has spent his adult life in Australia working across health, social services, policy, and research. He is the Executive Director of Population Health at the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), the peak representative body for Aboriginal health and wellbeing in Victoria.

Abe is a Senior Fellow in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health at the University of Melbourne and is a PhD candidate in medical anthropology at La Trobe University. His research is focused on correcting deficit discourses by focusing on how Aboriginal families maintain their oral histories through the recollection of treasured memories of happiness and belonging.



Kim Whiteley, Chief Executive Officer, The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council (NATSIAACC)

Kim Whiteley is an Aboriginal woman with traditional links to the Warramunga people of the Bogan River area and Wellington (Binjain country) in central-west NSW, Wiradjuri nation.

With more than 40 years' leadership across Education, Health, Justice, and Aboriginal Land Rights — grounded in Policy, Cultural Safety, and improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Kim has built a respected national profile as a reform leader and advocate for culturally safe systems change.

As CEO of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council (NATSIAACC), she works to ensure Elders can age with dignity, respect, and self-determination in community-led services.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Mr Kahurangi Fergusson-Tibble Ngāti Porou, Te Aitanga a Māhaki, Ngāti Uenukukōpako. Waha Tohutohu Matua Principal Advisor Māori

Akahurangi descends from the nations of Ngāti Porou, Te Aitanga a Māhaki and Ngāti Uenukukōpako. These nations are situated in Te Tai Rāwhiti (the East Coast of the North Island) and Rotorua (the Central Plateau of the North Island) in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Kahurangi is the son of two prominent health warriors, leaders and advocates, Mr Maaka Tauranga Tibble and Roberta Huinga Tibble, nee Cookson, who both worked tirelessly in the areas of disabilities, mental health, and addictions. Kahurangi's late father, Mr Maaka Tibble, was one of the founding members of what was formerly known as Ngāti Kaapo and is now known as Kaapo Māori o Aotearoa (Māori Blind Association), and was a staunch advocate for the rights of blind Māori and disabled Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. He also created the word that we use here in Aotearoa New Zealand - instead of disability or disabled, to describe our community, we use the word “Whaikaha”, which does not translate to disability or disabled. It translates to “have strength”, “to have ability” and “to enable”.

Kahurangi proudly walks in his parents' footsteps to continue this legacy and leave a better space for his tamariki and mokopuna (children and grandchildren). Kahurangi has also worked in the disability, mental health and addictions sectors in Aotearoa. He continues to work and represent the needs of Tāngata Whaikaha in the Waitangi Tribunal.

Lastly, Kahurangi is an active member of his community and a speaker for and on behalf of his people when called upon. Kahurangi participates in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and currently holds the rank of blue belt. He is a husband to Dr Chloe Fergusson-Tibble and father to Jaxyn and Storm, so just your regular friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man.

JILIPIA NAPPALIARI JONES ORATION



Janet Richardson

Aunty Janet is of the Baard and Yawuru Culture, an Ooranyg / Ngala Jandu (Saltwater Woman) Heritage from Broome in the Dampier Peninsula of the West Kimberley Region. Aunty Janet's passion is working with Indigenous patients in eye health to minimise unnecessary vision loss.

Aunty Janet currently works as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer at Lions Outback Vision in Broome, WA, where she joined in 2021 to help address blindness and vision loss among regional, remote, and Indigenous Western Australians. Here, Aunty Janet oversees patient transport, liaises with patients and specialists to provide cultural support, and assists when language barriers arise. She also offers cultural education for LOV staff and supports research projects by giving cultural guidance and assisting research participants.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Aunty Eva Jo Edwards Mutti Mutti, Boonwurrung and Yorta Yorta woman and survivor of the Stolen Generations

Eva Jo Edwards has spent much of her adult life rediscovering and re-engaging with the culture she lost as a child. After being taken at 5 years old, Eva Jo spent the rest of her childhood in State care, splintered from much of her family but emerging as a determined young woman who found work, reconnected with her family and has never stopped exploring her Aboriginal heritage. Eva Jo's tenacity has led her to become a cultural educator who uses performance and public speaking, along with managerial, administrative, and teaching skills, across her diverse career.

Eva Jo, along with her cousin/uncle Kutcha Edwards, has run education workshops titled Banyip Kidjeka (brother/sister), which has led to Eva Jo receiving regular guest speaking roles in both the education and corporate sectors. She also offers Aboriginal cultural sessions at schools, libraries and festivals, and most recently has been presenting Aboriginal Story Time as a cultural introduction for very young children.

A milestone in her life was February 13th 2008, when she travelled to Canberra for The Apology to the Stolen Generations, where she had a seat in Parliament and met the Prime Minister, Mr Kevin Rudd. A picture of Eva Jo with Mr Rudd appeared the next day on the front page of the Financial Review.

Aunty Sandra Barber, survivor of Stolen Generations



Aunty Sandra Barber, a proud member of the Dja Dja Wurrung people, traces her lineage back to her apical ancestor, Emma Curr. As part of the Stolen Generations, she has reconnected with her heritage through dance over the years. Discovering her roots in the early 1990s profoundly shaped the course of her life.

For the first seven years of her life, Sandra was a ward of the state due to past government policies. Currently, she serves as the Co-Chair of the Stolen Generations Advisory Committee for the Department of Justice, entering her fourth year in this important role.

Despite living with legal blindness for most of her life, Sandra has used her life experiences to enhance her ability to listen more closely to her intuition and to be more aware of her surroundings and their effects on her physical, emotional, and social well-being. During this journey, she discovered a deeper passion for teaching, which has always been a natural part of her story.

SPEAKERS



Hon Rebecca White MP, Assistant Minister for Women, Assistant Minister for Indigenous Health, Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care, Australian Labor Party



Christine Couzens MP, The Parliamentary Secretary for First Peoples, Member for Geelong



Monica Barolits-McCabe, Executive Director, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)



**Associate Professor Julian L Rait OAM, FRACS
FRANZCO FAICD, Vice President of The Australian Medical Association (AMA)**

SPEAKERS



Jaki Adams, International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) Indigenous Peoples Special Interest Group



Renata Watene, Ngā Puhi, Ngati Hikairo, International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) Indigenous Peoples Special Interest Group



Michael Graham, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Aboriginal Health Service



**Councillor Dr Olivia Ball
City of Melbourne**

DAY 1 - MONDAY 11TH MAY 2026

Conference Registration

8:20 - 8:50	Conference Registration	8:20 - 8:50	Conference Registration
9 - 11:30am	Fitzroy Walking Tour with Gavin Brown from Victorian Aboriginal Health Service		
9am - 5.00pm	Weaving, WUDTJAMEEN (all day event), Betty Cuthbert Bar		

11.30-12.30

Welcome Reception (all delegates)

Ampitheatre	MC Lose Fonua
	Near the Scar Tree, Opposite Gate 4, Yarra Parklands, Melbourne Cricket Ground
	Welcome to Country, Smoking Ceremony and Cultural Performance Djirri Djirri Cultural Services

12.30-1.30

Lunch (all delegates)

12.30-1.30pm	First Nations Eye Health Alliance <i>Annual General Meeting</i>		
Olympic Room	Closed Session (Invitation only)		
2:00 - 3.30 pm	First Nations Workshop, <i>FNEHA</i>	2:00 - 3:30pm	Non-First Nations Workshop, <i>FNEHA</i>
Jim Stynes A	National Plan Round Tables	Olympic Room	National Plan Round Tables
2:00- 3.30	Tino Rangatiratanga: A Māori Vision of Eye Health workshop - Māori delegates only		
Dillbabiik Room			

3:30 - 4:00

Afternoon Tea (all delegates)

4:00 - 5:00	First Nations Workshop Continued	4:00-5:00	Non-First Nations Workshop continued
	National Plan Round Tables		National Plan Round Tables
4:00 - 5:00	Tino Rangatiratanga: A Māori Vision of Eye Health workshop - Māori delegates only Renata Watene and Nicola Anstice		
Dillbabiik Room			

Conference Registration

- 8:30 - 9:00 Conference Registration
- 9am - 5.00pm Weaving, WUDTJAMEEN (all day event), Betty Cuthbert Bar

Opening Plenary | Theme: Transition - Reforming Systems and Creating Change

- Olympic Room **MC Lose Fonua**
- 9:00 - 10.00am
1. Conference Opening
 2. Monica McCabe, **National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation**
 3. Assistant Minister White, **Assistant Minister for Indigenous Health, Australian Labor Party**
 4. Christine Cousins: **Parliamentary Secretary for First Peoples (Victoria)**
 5. Dr Olivia Bell, **Councillor, City of Melbourne**

10:00 - 10:30 Morning Tea

Plenary Two | Empowerment of our people: the criticality of community voice and action

- Olympic Room **MC Shaun Tatipata**
- 10.30-12.00pm
1. Professor John Kaldor, **University of New South Wales Kirby Institute**
 2. Mr Kahurangi Fergusson-Tibble: **International Speaker** **KEYNOTE SPEAKER**
 3. Jaki Adams and Renata Watene, **International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, Indigenous Peoples Special Interest Group**

12.00 - 1 pm Lunch (all delegates)

1:00 - 1.30 Plenary

- Olympic Room **MC Nick Wilson**
- 1:00-1.30pm **Keynote Presentation** Kim Whitley, **The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council (NATSIAACC)** **KEYNOTE SPEAKER**
- 1:35 - 1.50pm **Gavin Brown, Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS)**
- 1:50 - 3.00pm **Table Tops with Nick Wilson**

3:00 - 3:30PM Afternoon Tea (all delegates)

Plenary Three | Empowerment of our people the criticality of community voice and action (continued)

- Olympic Room **MC Teline Cowdrey**
- 3:35-3.55pm **Keynote Presentation** Abe Ropitini, **The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)** **KEYNOTE SPEAKER**
- 4:00 - 5:00pm **Concurrent Sessions**

4.00-5.00pm Concurrent Sessions | Stream 1: Leadership and positioning for success

Jim Stynes A **MC Thomas Mylne**

- 1 Optometry A Collaboration between stakeholders improves access to eye care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. **Shelley Hopkins & Chantelle Pooley**
- 2 A Journey in Allyship, **Rachael Bowman and Kate Roberts**
- 3 Transition – what are we learning? **Shaun Tatipata, Mitchell Anjou**

Concurrent Sessions | Stream 2: Empowering our people

Dillbabiik Room **MC Stephen Corporal**

- 1 Understanding a decade of progress in preventing vision loss among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia.
Lose Fonua and Khyber Alam
- 2 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Eye health measures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
Fadwa Al-Yaman
- 3 Mā te Wā - Good things take time: Māori health curriculum delivery in an Australian Optometry Program.
Renata Watene and Shelley Hopkins

Concurrent Sessions | Stream 3: Promoting Integrated Health Solutions

Jim Stynes B **MC Tanya Morris**

- 1 Implementation of the first Ninnox Vision retinal screening service in Broome
Angus Turner and Soleil White
- 2 Improving access to specialist eye care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples using telehealth
Kerry Woods, Jingyi Chen, Angus Turner
- 3 Eye Hear You- The Western NSW Eye Health Partnership PREM Project
Jessica Rae & Tori Towney

6:30 - 10.00 pm Gala Dinner and Awards | MCG Members Room

Please note that this is a ticketed event. If you are unsure if your registration has a Gala dinner ticket, please get in touch with the FNEHA conference team.

Address: MCG Members Room, Melbourne Cricket Ground, Brunton Ave, Richmond, VIC 3002, Australia
FNEHA Telephone: (02) 4677 7012
FNEHA Contact email: heyyoumob@fneha.com.au



Conference Registration

8:30 - 9:00	Conference Registration
9am - 4.00pm	Weaving, WUDTJAMEEN (all day event), Betty Cuthbert Bar

Plenary Four | Theme: Reconciliation: Bridging now to next

Olympic Room **MC Lauren Carr**

9:00 - 10.00 **Speaker:** Auntie Eva Jo Edwards, *Mutti Mutti, Boonwurrung and Yorta Yorta woman and Survivor of the Stolen Generations*
Video: Seeing Our Way: Life and Legacy, **First Nations Eye Health Alliance**
Speaker: Jilpia Nappaljari Jones **Memorial Oration** Janet Richardson

**KEYNOTE
SPEAKER**

**KEYNOTE
SPEAKER**

10:00 - 10:30

Morning Tea

10:30 - 12:00

Workshops

Jim Stynes A	A practical introduction to Ophthalmology A/Professor Kris Rallah-Baker, Dr Thomas Mylne, RANZCO
Olympic Room	Cultural Education, Djirri Djirri Cultural Services Dr. Mandy Nicholson
Jim Stynes B	A population health approach to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye care services and systems A/Professor Mitchell Anjou, Minum Barreng: Indigenous Eye Health Unit
Dillbabiik Room	Advocacy and Government Relations Mia Linden, Delta Advisory
MCG Bowl	Eye Health Collaborative Round Table (Closed Meeting by invitation only) Lose Fonua FNEHA and Monica McCabe NACCHO

12:00 - 1:00

Lunch (all delegates)

1:00 - 1.30

Plenary

Olympic Room	MC Associate Professor Kris Rallah-Baker Speaker Associate Professor Julian L Rait OAM, <i>The Australian Medical Association</i>
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1:30 - 2:30

Concurrent Sessions | Stream 1: Leadership and Positioning for Success

Dillbabiik Room	MC Makkaliah Ridgeway Ngaaminy: A First Nations led project mapping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community expectations of good eye health for children Lose Fonua, Stephen Corporal and Nicola Anstice First Nations Visual Acuity Chart Design, an initiative of the "Sight and Smiles" project Ms Jessica Curnuck and Associate Professor Khyber Alam Optometry Australia's Commitment Statement: Supporting the Development of a Culturally Safe Optometry Profession Nicola Anstice
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1:30 - 2:30

Concurrent Sessions | Stream 2: Empowering Our People

Jim Stynes A

MC Shaun Tatipata

The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital - Committed to Delivering in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health

Brendon Gardner, Natalie Tieri, Renee Chmielewski, Rosie Dawkins

How South Australia Eliminated blinding Trachoma as a public health problem

Sharon Bilney & Carlos Hernandez

Improving Eye Health Outcomes on the Sunshine Coast Through Collaborative Partnerships

Candice Pearson & Coen Keyte

1:30 - 2:30

Concurrent Sessions | Stream 3: Promoting Integrated Health Solutions

Jim Stynes B

MC Sara Carrison

The Indigenous and Remote Eye Health Service (IRIS) program

Georgia Bennett and Sarina Martin

An update on the development and validation of the new Turtle visual acuity chart

Shelley Hopkins & Deb Duthie

Paediatric Physiotherapy Supporting Clients with Vision Impairments

Kristy Petrie

2:30 - 3:00

Afternoon Tea

3:00-4.00

Closing Session | Theme: Seeing our Way: Healing Now Then and Always

Olympic Room

MC Lose Fonua

Speaker: Aunty Sandra Barber, **Stolen Generations Survivor**

Speaker: NATSIHEC26 Reflections

Speaker: Telaine Cowdrey **First Nations Eye Health Alliance**

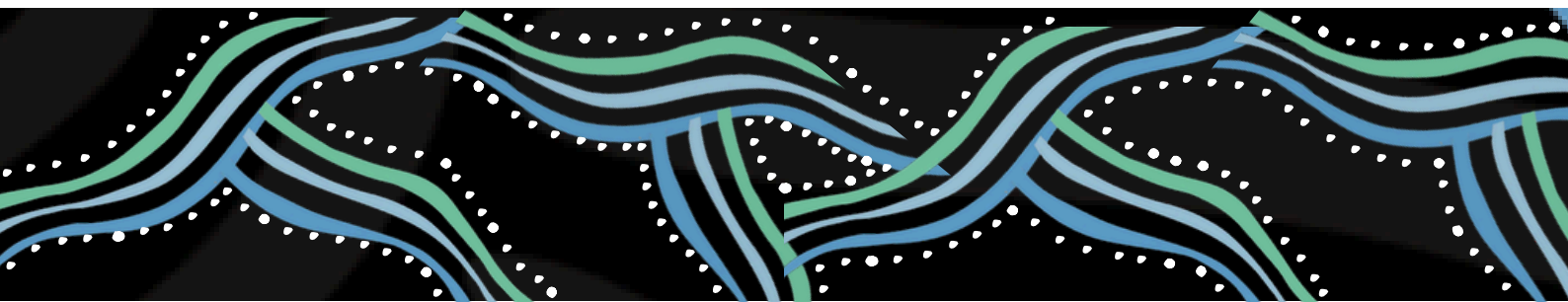


TABLE TOPS

Our Tabletop Presentations provide an interactive forum for delegates to engage directly with presenters in a more informal and collaborative setting. Held in the Olympic Room on Day Two of the conference, Monday 12 May from 1:50pm–3:00pm, these roundtable sessions showcase emerging research, innovative programs, workforce initiatives, and community-led approaches in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health. Delegates are encouraged to move between tables, ask questions, share perspectives, and connect with presenters through meaningful discussion and knowledge exchange.

This years table top presentations are listed below. Look for the table number on the day to find the presentations.

1. Seeing Our Way: Creating Pathways into Ophthalmology for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Medical Students, Dr Brodie Seymour
2. VAHS Paediatric Eye Clinic: the undervalued role of the orthoptist in providing crucial subspecialty care, Kylie Middleton and Susan Carden
3. Darwin Preschool Vision Screening Program, Tamika Tonson
4. A culturally safe and timely service model for access to aflibercept injections, Tinu Abraham and Barringunn Bulic
5. Seeing our way, life after vision loss and the power of a referral, Renee Rich & Ellie Hudson
6. The Role of the Orthoptist in an ACCHO Eye Clinic, Melissa Tchea, Kelli McGuinness
7. Using the 715 Health Check to Support Strong Eyes, Makkaillah Ridgeway, Shaun Tatipata, Lesley Martin
8. Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs: From Hygiene to Healthy Housing and Homes, Lesley Martin
9. In pursuit of equitable, nationally consistent subsidised spectacle schemes in Australia, Ms Madeline Baker, Dr Nicola Anstice
10. Vision Science Innovation Alliance (VSIA), What Would Good Look Like? Keely Bumsted O'Brien

TABLE TOPS

1. Seeing Our Way: Creating Pathways into Ophthalmology for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Medical Students, Presenter/Author: Dr Brodie Seymour

In 2025, I became the first recipient of the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital scholarship for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students undertaking an ophthalmology placement. The scholarship supported a six-week placement at the Eye and Ear in Melbourne and removed practical barriers that can make specialist training opportunities difficult to access, particularly for students travelling from regional or interstate communities.

The placement provided broad exposure to ophthalmology and strengthened my understanding of the clinical skill, precision and teamwork required across the specialty. More importantly, it demonstrated the value of practical, targeted support in helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students enter spaces where we remain significantly underrepresented.

This presentation reflects on the role scholarship programs can play in creating pathways into ophthalmology and why that matters beyond the individual student. Strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in eye health is not only about workforce diversity; it is also about cultural safety, trust, and improving long-term eye health outcomes for our communities.

2. VAHS Paediatric Eye Clinic: the undervalued role of the orthoptist in providing crucial subspecialty care

Presenter/Author: Kylie Middleton and Susan Garden

The Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) Eye Clinic, delivered in partnership with the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, provides fortnightly culturally safe specialist eye care within VAHS' established primary healthcare model. As part of this service, VAHS runs a monthly, dedicated paediatric eye clinic, bringing crucial subspecialty care directly to children in the community.

Each session is led by a paediatric ophthalmologist and supported by an orthoptist, whose broad clinical skillset includes refraction, assessment of strabismus, visual field testing, retinal imaging, and ocular biometry. By undertaking detailed visual assessment, investigations, and care coordination, orthoptists play an indispensable role in delivering a streamlined, comprehensive service that supports efficient use of specialist time and continuity of care.

Together, the VAHS orthoptist and ophthalmologist help overcome longstanding barriers to access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients and provide important sight-restoring care for young children. The VAHS Eye Clinic model demonstrates the impact of integrating orthoptists into community-based services in strengthening culturally responsive care, expanding service capacity, and advancing equity in eye health.

TABLE TOPS

3. Darwin Preschool Vision Screening Program

Presenter: Tamika Tonson

The Darwin Preschool Screening Project is an eye health initiative driven by Indigenous Allied Health Assistant in partnership with Orthoptists, delivering early vision screening to children in the Darwin region in school settings. The program combined community knowledge and relationships with clinical eye care to provide screening that is accessible, culturally appropriate, and trusted by families and schools.

4. A culturally safe and timely service model for access to aflibercept injections

Presenters: Tinu Abraham and Barringunn Bulic

Timely access to aflibercept is critical for preventing vision loss in conditions such as neovascular age-related macular degeneration, diabetic macular oedema, and retinal vein occlusion. This project describes the development of a culturally safe and efficient model for aflibercept access within the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS), an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation. In partnership with visiting ophthalmologists from the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, specialist retinal care is delivered in a trusted community setting that supports engagement and continuity.

The supply pathway ensures uninterrupted access through authority-approved prescriptions issued by visiting ophthalmologists, supported by aflibercept samples supplied by Bayer and community-pharmacy dispensing. All aflibercept delivered to VAHS is stored in a cold-chain monitored refrigerator within the in-house dispensary, enabling timely supply on clinic days. The dispensary also stores and supplies Schedule 4 medicines required for administration, including tetracaine eye drops.

Administrative processes were strengthened through structured logs for tracking prescriptions, storage compliance, and injection administration. PBS authority applications, once submitted by post, are now completed online via PRODA, with postal options retained for exceptional circumstances.

This model demonstrates how visiting specialists, supported by culturally grounded service design, can deliver sight-preserving therapy within an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation, improving access to complex medicines for Aboriginal communities.

5. Seeing our way, life after vision loss and the power of a referral

Presenters: Renee Rich & Ellie Hudson

Across Australia, many people experiencing vision loss are still told, “there is nothing more we can do to help your vision,” without being told about Blindness and Low Vision Services. This experience can leave individuals and families feeling isolated, overwhelmed, and unsure of what comes next. Yet support is available across Australia from services like Vision Australia. This tabletop session explores the critical role that making a referral has on improving wellbeing, confidence, and independence for people adapting to life with vision loss.

Despite the availability of services, referrals remain inconsistent. Why is this happening? What information do referrers need? Where are the gaps in our communication about what we do, when we can help, and who is eligible?

This session invites you to reflect on past experiences and share your perspective on opportunities to strengthen referral pathways so that no person navigating vision loss is left without support.

TABLE TOPS

6. The Role of the Orthoptist in an ACCHO Eye Clinic

Authors/Presenters: Melissa Tchea, Kelli McGuinness

The Victorian Aboriginal Health Service is an ACCHO in inner city Melbourne, and hosts a mature multi-disciplinary eye clinic with partnerships with the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital and the Australian College of Optometry.

All of the members of the team are essential to the good functioning of the clinic, and providing high quality, culturally safe care. This presentation will specifically explore the specialty role of orthoptics in this clinic.

Orthoptists are allied health professionals with skills across all aspects of eye care, and have particular skills in collaborative care.

This presentation will explore specific skills in examination of adults, complex refraction, eye movements, paediatric examination, multi-modal imaging, referral triage and clinical judgement. They will also discuss roles that orthoptists hold in other settings such as assisting in the operating theatre and LASER vision correction, which may be applicable as ACCHO services expand.

For interested participants, the presenters will be happy to discuss pathways into orthoptics, and how orthoptists can be successfully embedded in ACCHOs.

7. Using the 715 Health Check to Support Strong Eyes

Authors/Presenters: Makkaillah Ridgeway, Shaun Tatipata, Lesley Martin

The Eyecare Now, Eyecare Always (ENEA) national health promotion resources promote regular eye checks to support early detection and prevention of vision loss among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Check (MBS 715) provides an opportunity to raise eye health within routine primary health care; however, eye checks are not consistently included.

Minum Barreng: Indigenous Eye Health Unit has supported the development of Health Check-linked eye check resources, including a clinic poster and the Your Eyes and the 715 Health Check flipchart and community brochure, to prompt eye checks and awareness of common eye conditions. Messages are reinforced by existing ENEA resources, including short Eye Health Heroes videos featuring Aboriginal leaders and community voices.

Developed with input from Aboriginal Health Workers/Practitioners, community members and primary care providers, the resources align with the RACGP/NACCHO National Guide to Preventive Healthcare for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and support strong eyes all through life (for kids, adults and Elders). Early uptake by ACCHOs and health services indicates demand for practical tools that integrate eye health into routine care. Stewardship of these ENEA resources is transitioning to the First Nations Eye Health Alliance (FNEHA) in 2026.

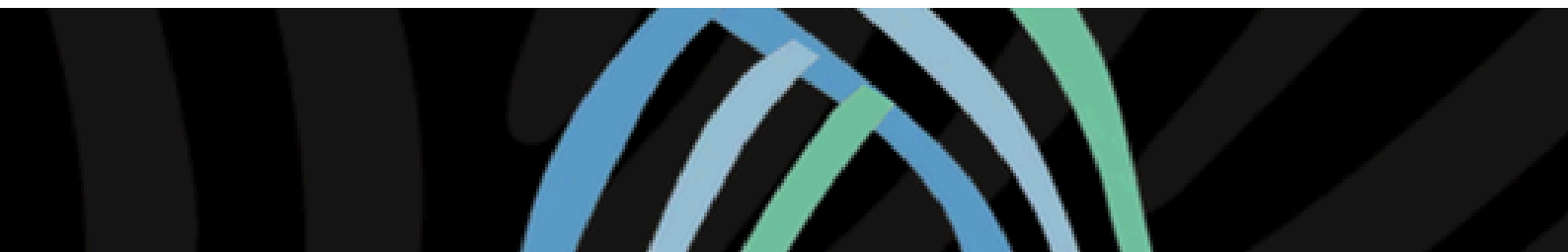


TABLE TOPS

8. Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs: From Hygiene to Healthy Housing and Homes

Presenters: Lesley Martin

Milpa's Six Steps to Stop Germs, featuring Milpa the Goanna, has been used across communities, schools and clinics to support children's health through simple everyday hygiene practices, originally developed to support children's eye health and trachoma prevention. Minum Barreng: Indigenous Eye Health Unit is developing a new flipchart that brings these familiar Milpa messages together into one practical resource for Aboriginal Health Workers/Practitioners, environmental health staff, educators and families.

The flipchart reinforces Milpa's Six Steps core messages and links everyday hygiene (clean hands, faces and bodies and not sharing towels etc.) with prevention of infections affecting eyes, ears, skin, teeth and general wellbeing. The resource highlights that families are best supported when healthy housing and homes are available, and that access to water, washing facilities and safe living environments is essential.

The resource also encourages families to check in with the clinic, reinforcing that environmental, preventative and clinical care work together, and acknowledges the hard work communities have done to help eliminate trachoma. This draft is being shared to seek feedback on language, shared messaging and usefulness in practice. The resource is being developed alongside the planned transition of Minum Barreng trachoma health promotion to community-controlled stewardship through NACCHO.

9. In pursuit of equitable, nationally consistent subsidised spectacle schemes in Australia

Presenters: Ms Madeline Baker, Dr Nicola Anstice

The 2015 Principles and Recommended Implementation Standards for Nationally Consistent Subsidised Spectacle Schemes, developed by Optometry Australia and endorsed by NACCHO and Vision 2020 Australia, aimed to establish a set of minimum standards and principles for subsidised spectacle schemes around the country which meet the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Our poster will provide an overview of the journey towards an updated set of principles - from early Roadmap to Close the Gap recommendations to contemporary sector workshops at NATSIEHC24 and NATSIEHC25. It will present the strengthened Principles, which reflect extensive input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health leaders and partners across the eye health sector and highlight a renewed focus on co-design, equity, reduced administrative burden, and improved access to clinically required spectacles, contact lenses and low-vision aids.

It will also outline a proposed shared advocacy strategy that aims to collaborate with partner organisations and local networks to seek improvements within existing jurisdictional schemes. We invite partners, communities and stakeholders to help shape this next phase – and will include a QR code to enable conference attendees to connect with us, share feedback, or support this work.

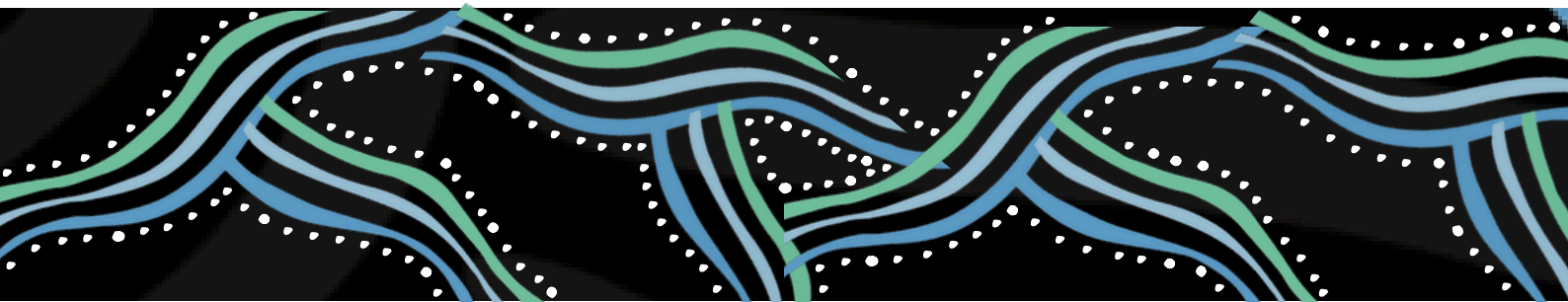


TABLE TOPS

10. Vision Science Innovation Alliance (VSIA): What Would Good Look Like?

Authors/Presenters: Keely Bumsted O'Brien

Help us build something worth building.

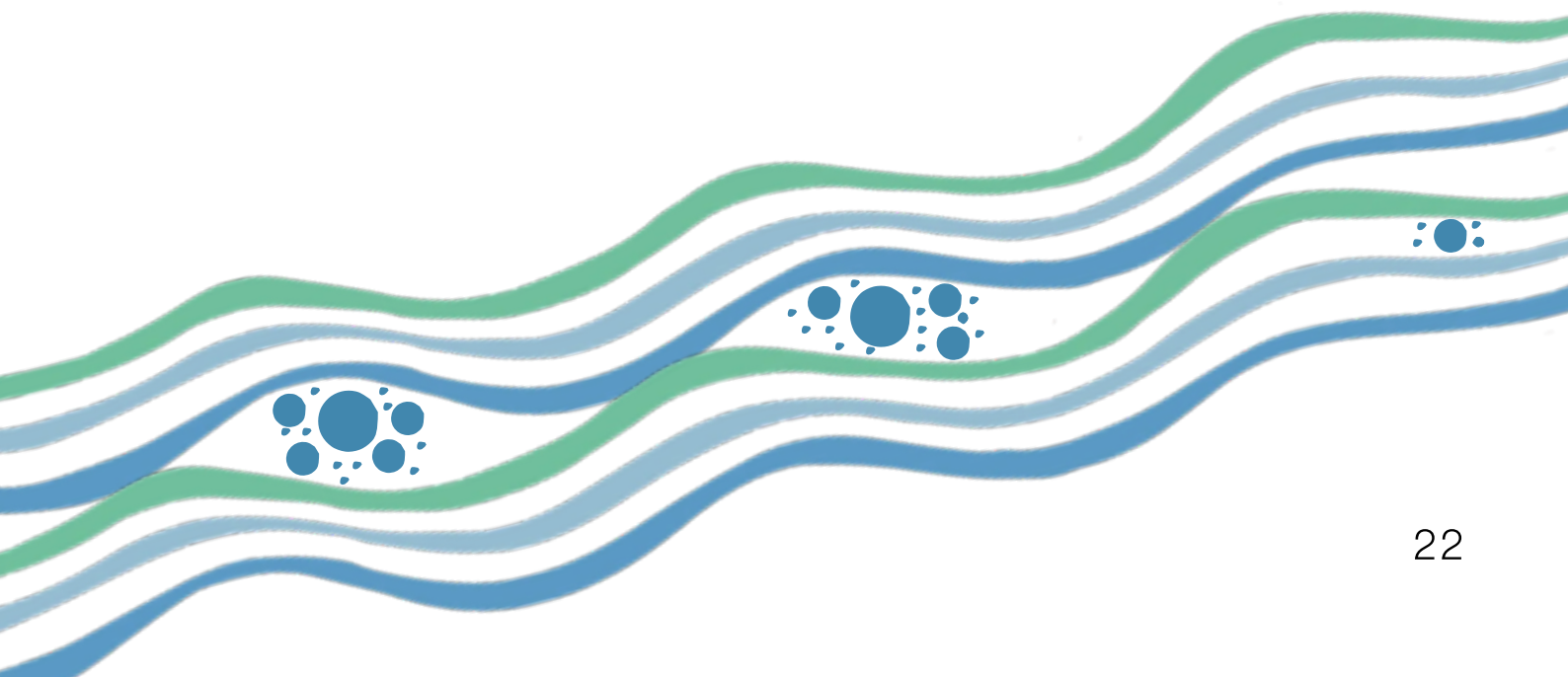
Eye health research in Australia has incredible talent but it's often scattered. The Vision Science Innovation Alliance (VSIA) is being built to change that. We're bringing together researchers, clinicians, educators, and innovators from across Melbourne's leading vision science organisations to work as one by pooling resources, aligning priorities, and driving research from the lab into real communities.

But we're not here to tell you what we're doing. We're here to ask what good looks like to you.

What would genuinely excellent, culturally safe eye health research and engagement look like for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities? What would a partnership that actually works for mob feel like? What would you want to see us do — or never do?

We're still building VSIA, and the answers you share at this table will shape what it becomes.

Come and help us imagine it right.



1.

Transition – what are we learning?*Shaun Tatipata, Mitchell Anjou*

Minum Barreng: Indigenous Eye Health Unit is actively transitioning a number of activities and work areas to First Nations organisations and leadership, consistent with its commitment to support self-determination and in preparation for the Unit's conclusion at the end of 2026.

This presentation will reflect on experiences and observations from this transition journey, and, through practical examples, provide insights into key barriers and enablers. Minum Barreng has been involved in transitioning a national conference, governance and advisory structures, sector coordination and support roles and three national health promotion programs. The Unit is also working to transfer expertise, relationships and responsibilities associated with health systems reform activities.

We will identify other areas of eye health sector work where transition may be possible and share learnings for consideration and potential application for other organisations.

Transition is not simply a handover of programs and materials. It requires conscious and respectful shared planning, stepping back, making space, amplifying First Nations voices and leadership and maintaining continuity of care and prevention efforts.

This presentation invites the sector to actively consider our roles in supporting transition to genuine self-determination in all areas of eye health.

2.

A Journey in Allyship*Rachael Bowman and Kate Roberts*

is concurrent session, facilitated by The Fred Hollows Foundation and Roche, will explore allyship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the health sector and provide space for shared learning and reflection.

The session will include an overview of allyship as a concept, discussion on how allyship is practiced within our organisations, and reflections on the ongoing journey from allyship to accomplice. Facilitators will share practical examples, personal learnings, and experiences that have shaped their understanding and approach to allyship in professional settings.

The workshop was developed in response to reflections from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference (NATSIEHC25), where there was recognition of the continued need for growth, learning, and accountability among non-Indigenous allies across the sector.

3.

Optometry A Collaboration between stakeholders improves access to eye care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.*Presenters: Shelley Hopkins & Chantelle Pooley*

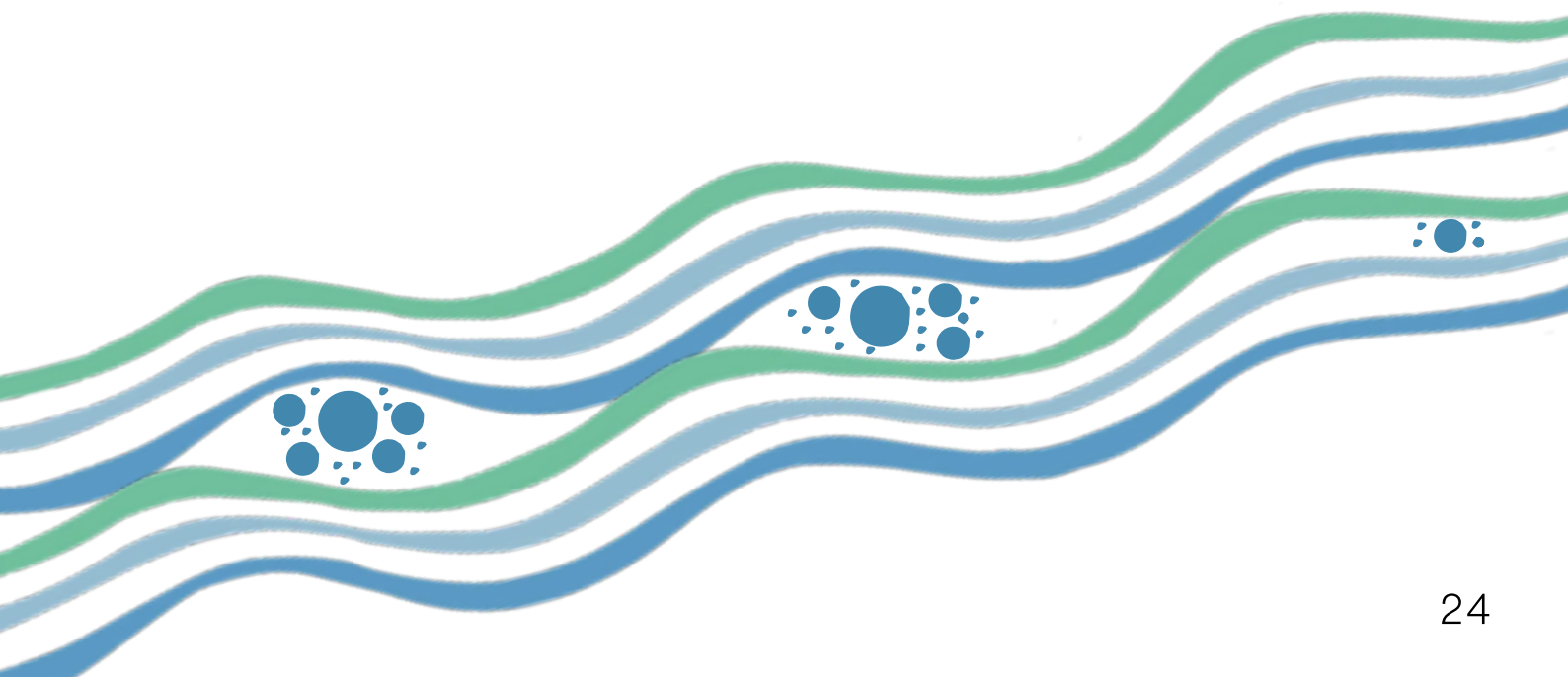
This presentation outlines a collaborative model between Queensland Health's Primary School Nurse Health Readiness Program (PSNHRP) and the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Optometry outreach clinics, supported by CheckUP. The PSNHRP is a statewide service that offers free, school-based vision screenings to all Prep-aged children in Queensland, including state, Catholic and independent schools.

Early detection of common eye conditions (amblyopia and refractive error) allows for prompt treatment, and improved visual outcomes. However, ensuring timely follow-up care after identification of a potential visual abnormality is crucial to minimise any long term impact to a child's vision, learning and development. By aligning PSNHRP vision screening schedules with QUT Optometry's school-based outreach clinics, children requiring

3. (CONTINUED)

follow-up care can access free vision assessments at their school (including provision of glasses when required).

A second key aspect of the screening program that is also improving visual outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is the collaboration between PSNHRP, CheckUP, local Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations, and optometrists supported by the Visiting Optometrists Scheme (VOS). These strong partnerships enable the tailored development and delivery of children's vision screening pathways that are culturally safe for families, promoting health equity and better eye-health outcomes.



1.

Understanding a decade of progress in preventing vision loss among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia.

Lose Fonua and Khyber Alam

Vision loss has substantial impacts on the health, lives and economies of affected individuals. Across the life course, preventable vision loss disproportionately affects children and older people. Individuals may experience reduced quality of life, social isolation, barriers to education and achievement, reduced economic participation, and shortened life expectancy. Globally, it is estimated that by 2050, 1.8 billion people will have untreated preventable vision loss, with the most disadvantaged experiencing the greatest burden.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia are greatly disadvantaged, experiencing blindness and vision loss at three times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians. Most vision loss is preventable.

The Ngaaminya Project is co-led by Wiradjuri woman Lose Fonua, CEO of the First Nations Eye Health Alliance (FNEHA), in collaboration with Shaun Tatitpata, a Ngarrindjeri/Wuthathi man, Darwin local and Chair of the FNEHA Board. Together, Lose and Shaun will present preliminary findings from this research project examining perspectives on what good eye health means for First Nations children aged 0–6 in Darwin and what services are needed to support it.

2.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Eye health measures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Fadwa Al-Yaman

The AIHW plays a critical role in providing national data and evidence to help us understand trends in eye health, access to services, and outcomes across the sector.

Their work brings together key information on the prevalence of eye conditions, screening and treatment, workforce, and service delivery, helping to track progress over time and identify where gaps remain.

This evidence is essential in guiding policy, strengthening programs, and supporting the collective effort to improve eye health outcomes.

3.

Mā te Wā - Good things take time: Māori health curriculum delivery in an Australian Optometry Program.*Renata Watene and Shelley Hopkins*

The aim of this presentation is to share the experience of including Māori health curriculum and anti-racism content in the QUT Optometry program using a collaborative approach.

The Optometry Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Curriculum Framework was released by OCANZ in 2018. This was shortly followed by the Optometry Māori Health Curriculum Framework (2023). Optometry programs across Australia and Aotearoa are required to incorporate curriculum as set out in both Frameworks. Meaningful inclusion of cultural safety and Indigenous health curriculum requires curriculum mapping, Indigenous leadership and appropriate co-design, co-development and scaffolding of content across the early and later years of optometry programs. Furthermore, consideration of appropriate pedagogy is required. That is, the 'how' the content is taught.

In the current climate, where flipped classrooms and asynchronous learning is a common teaching and learning approach, optometry programs need to question whether this is the most appropriate and effective strategy for this curriculum. Relationships and communication are at the core of cultural safety and Indigenous health. The presenters will share their learnings over a 3-year period in both developing curriculum content that aligns with both Frameworks as well as the changes in pedagogical approaches made to maximise student engagement with materials.

CONCURRENT SESSIONS | STREAM 3 : PROMOTING INTEGRATED HEALTH SOLUTIONS | JIM STYNES GRILL B

1.

Implementation of the first Ninox Vision retinal screening service in Broome*Angus Turner and Soleil White*

Ninox Vision was founded in 2025 to translate the research success that demonstrated key implementation strategies for enhancing diabetic retinal screening services. Improved automation of camera technology, integration with primary care electronic records and use of point-of-care diagnostic results with ethnically-validated AI algorithms lifted screening rates and created a useful business case for utilising Medicare rebates.

A retrospective review was conducted of the first 2 months post implementation of a Ninox Vision service at the Broome Aboriginal Medical Service between 15 October to 15 December 2025 and compared to the same period the prior year. The rates of screening and utilisation of Medicare were examined.

A total of 70 patient diabetic retinal screens were conducted during this period. The Medicare billings were above \$7362 utilising 12325, 75857 (bulk billing incentive from 1st Nov, 2025) and 10997 or 10987 when support and patient education provided as part of the photograph acquisition. There were no diabetic retinal screens in the same period of 2024 and only 14 for the entire year.

Ninox Vision diabetic retinal screening has seen major uplift in screening rates. It has demonstrated a strong business case for supporting infrastructure and service delivery in the setting of an Aboriginal Community Controlled primary care facility. Community-led, culturally informed digital health models should remain central to efforts to close the gap in eye health outcomes.

2.

Improving access to specialist eye care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples using telehealth

Kerry Woods, Jingyi Chen, Angus Turner

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, telehealth can be a valuable way to provide care On Country and reduce travel burden. Lions Outback Vision has used telehealth for eye care since 2011. This study aims to determine how synchronous teleophthalmology services have been used for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Western Australia over a seven-year period.

A retrospective review was conducted using clinical records from telehealth consultations with an ophthalmologist between 2017 and 2023. Patient location, attendance rates, diagnoses, and clinical outcomes were recorded.

A total of 1,884 teleophthalmology services were scheduled for 1,221 patients residing in rural and metropolitan Western Australia. The attendance rate was 94.8%. Optometrists facilitated most outpatient consultations (87.9%), followed by registrars, other health professionals, and direct-to-patient consultations. Telehealth enabled 662 surgical bookings and 318 peri-operative consultations for conditions such as cataract.

Optometry-facilitated telehealth can play a key role in improving access to eye care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and reducing the burden on public ophthalmology. Telehealth enabled direct surgical waitlisting for cataract, bypassing the wait for wait, and opportunistic care provision. Community-led digital health models should remain central to efforts to close the gap in eye health outcomes.

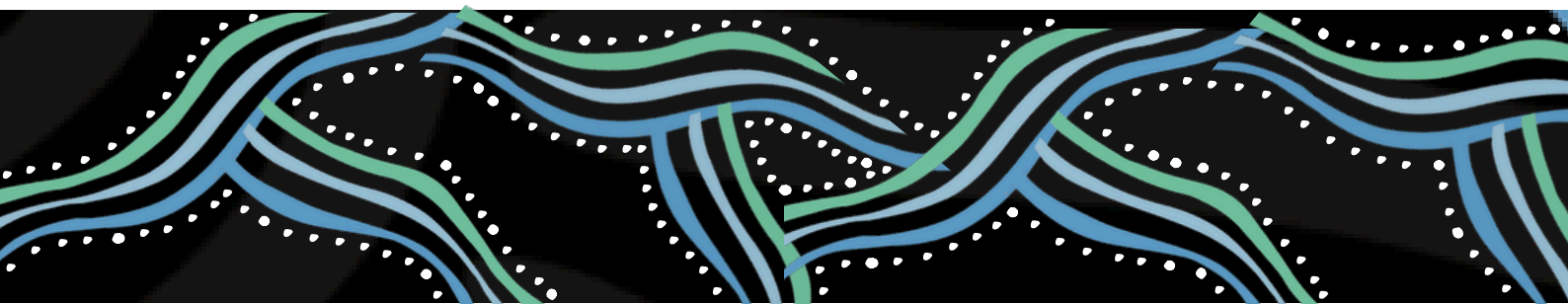
3.

Eye Hear You- The Western NSW Eye Health Partnership PREM Project

Jessica Rae & Tori Towney

Current Patient Reported Experience Measures (PREMs) used in eye care do not adequately reflect the cultural values, priorities and lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Existing measures are grounded in Western biomedical and individual-focused constructs, which overlook holistic, family- and community-centred understandings of wellbeing. This mismatch can result in incomplete or culturally misaligned service feedback, shaping clinical, organisational and policy decisions that may inadvertently disempower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients and communities.

This initiative is part of the Western NSW Eye Health Partnership and aligns with the Partnership's Strategic Outcomes Roadmap. Guided by an Indigenist methodology, the project will centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, strengths and sovereignty to co-design a culturally aligned eye-care PREM. By partnering with patients, families and communities to develop measures grounded in their values and experiences, this work aims to strengthen cultural safety and produce meaningful, actionable insights for clinicians, service providers and policy makers, supporting transformational improvements in eye-care delivery across Western NSW.



PLENARY PRESENTATIONS RECONCILLATION, STOLEN GENERATION AND LIFE

1.

Reconciliation Keynote * Aunty Eva Jo Edwards

Eva Jo Edwards has spent much of her adult life rediscovering and engaging again in the culture she lost as a child. After being taken at 5 years old Eva Jo spent the rest of her childhood in State care, splintered from much of her family but emerging as a determined young woman who found work, reconnected with her family and has never stopped exploring her Aboriginal heritage. Eva Jo's tenacity has seen her become a cultural educator who employs performance and public speaking as well as managerial, administrative and teaching skills in her diverse working life.

For the past 20 years Eva Jo, along with her cousin/uncle Kutcha Edwards, ran education workshops titled Banyip Kidjeka (brother/sister) which has led to Eva Jo receiving regular guest speaking roles in both the education and corporate sectors. She also offers Aboriginal cultural sessions at schools, libraries and festivals and most recently has been presenting Aboriginal Story Time as a cultural introduction for the very young.

A milestone in her life was February 13th 2008 when she travelled to Canberra for The Apology to the Stolen Generations where she had a seat in Parliament and met the Prime Minister, Mr Kevin Rudd. A picture of Eva Jo with Mr Rudd appeared the next day on the front page of the Financial Review..

2.

Jilpa Nappaljari Jones Memorial Oration*

Presenters: Aunty Janet Richardson

The Jilpia Nappaljari Jones Memorial Oration celebrates the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to eye care. The Oration was first introduced in the 2022 Conference and acknowledges the significant contribution Jilpia made to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and her inspiration for a whole generation of amazing women leaders in eye health. The 2025 Jilpia Nappaljari Jones Memorial Oration will be presented at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference 2026 by Aunty Janet Richardson.

3.

Seeing Our Way: Healing Now Then and Always*

Presenters: Aunty Sandra Barber

Aunty Sandra Barber, a proud member of the Dja Dja Wurrung people, traces her lineage back to her apical ancestor, Emma Curr. As part of the Stolen Generations, she has reconnected with her heritage through dance over the years. Discovering her roots in the early 1990s profoundly shaped the course of her life.

Aunty Sandra will be talking about the importance of Seeing Our Way with a focus on healing now and into the future for our people and nation.

**Please be advised that these sessions may contain references to trauma, grief, loss, drug use and lived experiences relating to the Stolen Generations and the ongoing impacts of colonisation. These topics may be distressing or triggering for some audience members. We acknowledge the strength and resilience of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and honour those who continue to share their stories. If this content brings up difficult feelings for you, please know that support is available. You can contact 13YARN – a 24/7, free, confidential support line run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 13YARN (13 92 76) Free and available any time.*

WORKSHOPS | CONCURRENT SESSIONS | JIM STYNES A

A Practical Introduction to Ophthalmology

Presenters: *A/Professor Kris Rallah-Baker, Dr Thomas Mylne, RANZCO*

Ophthalmology is a diverse and dynamic field that encompasses the diagnosis and management of various eye and systemic conditions. This interactive workshop, presented by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Committee, is designed to provide doctors who are interested in eye health with the practical skills and knowledge that can be implemented into clinical practice.

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

1. Conduct a basic eye history and examination and accurately measure visual acuity and intraocular pressure.
2. Identify common eye emergencies and identify grounds for referral.
3. Understand a day in the life of a Resident Medical Officer (RMO) and/or unaccredited RMO.

Participants will have the opportunity to practice the techniques discussed, receive immediate feedback, reflect on their experiences and share their insights. This approach ensures that participants are actively involved in the learning process and develop skills and knowledge they can apply in their own clinical settings.

WORKSHOPS | CONCURRENT SESSIONS | OLYMPIC ROOM

Cultural Education

Dr Mandy Nicholson, Djirri Djirri Cultural Services

Djirri Djirri Cultural Services is a Wurundjeri-led cultural education and dance group dedicated to sharing and strengthening Wurundjeri culture, language, ceremony and storytelling. As the only Wurundjeri women's dance group and Traditional Custodians of Narm (Melbourne) and surrounding Country, Djirri Djirri delivers engaging workshops that connect participants with Woiwurrung language, cultural knowledge, dance and creation stories. Their workshops provide a unique opportunity to learn about Country, community and the ongoing revival and celebration of Aboriginal culture through interactive and culturally grounded experiences

Dr Mandy Nicholson is Wurundjeri-willam (Wurundjeri-baluk patriline) artist, the founder, singer and songwriter of Djirri Djirri dance group and Traditional Custodian of Melbourne and surrounds. Mandy also has connections to the Dja Dja wurrung and Ngurai illam wurrung language groups of the Central/Eastern Kulin Nation on her father's side and German on her mother's.

WORKSHOPS | CONCURRENT SESSIONS | JIM STYNES B

A population health approach to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye care services and systems

A/Professor Mitchell Anjou, Minum Barreng: Indigenous Eye Health Unit

Who is missing out on eye care in your community and why?

Are people living with diabetes getting their annual eye checks? Is your service delivering the right mix of optometry and ophthalmology? And what does your local data actually tell you about unmet need, including access to glasses?

Many of us are asking these questions, but few feel confident in how to answer them or what to do next.

This practical workshop introduces a population health approach to strengthening eye care services and systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Drawing on real-world implementation of the Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision at a regional level, the session will share tested tools, frameworks and lessons learned from doing the work on the ground.

Participants will build confidence in interpreting and using local data, identifying priorities for action, bringing the right people together to design solutions, strengthening coordination across services, and supporting Aboriginal-led, culturally safe models of care.

This workshop is designed for clinicians, service providers, program managers and leaders who want to move beyond delivering care in isolation and towards more coordinated, responsive systems.

If these challenges sound familiar, this session will offer practical ways to respond and strengthen eye care systems in your local context.

WORKSHOPS | CONCURRENT SESSIONS | DILLBABIK ROOM

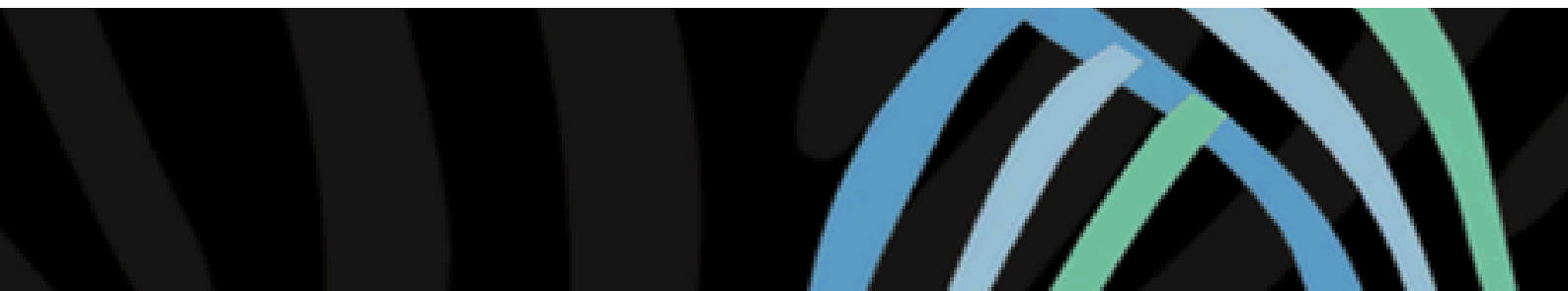
Advocacy and Government Relations

Presenter Mia Linden, Delta Advisory

Delta Advisory is a leading Australian strategic communications and public affairs consultancy specialising in government relations, stakeholder engagement and policy strategy. Through this workshop, participants will gain insights into navigating government processes, building effective relationships with decision-makers, and developing advocacy strategies that support meaningful policy outcomes. Drawing on extensive experience across the public, private and community sectors, Delta Advisory provides practical guidance on influencing change and strengthening engagement with government and key stakeholders.

Mia Linden is a strategic communications and government relations specialist at Delta Advisory, with experience supporting organisations to engage effectively with government, stakeholders and policy processes. Mia works across advocacy, public affairs and stakeholder engagement, helping clients navigate complex policy environments and build meaningful relationships that support positive outcomes for communities and organisations.

Workshop will include both theory and hands-on practical activities to build your knowledge and skills in advocacy and government relations.



1.

Ngaaminyia: A First Nations led project mapping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community expectations of good eye health for children

Presenter **Lose Fonua, Shaun Tatipata, Katrina Cox and Nicola Anstice**

Vision loss has substantial impacts on the health, lives and economies of affected individuals. Across the life course, preventable vision loss disproportionately affects children and older people. Individuals may experience reduced quality of life, social isolation, barriers to education and achievement, reduced economic participation, and shortened life expectancy. Globally, it is estimated that by 2050, 1.8 billion people will have untreated preventable vision loss, with the most disadvantaged experiencing the greatest burden.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia are greatly disadvantaged, experiencing blindness and vision loss at three times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians. Most vision loss is preventable.

The Ngaaminyia Project is co-led by Wiradjuri woman Lose Fonua, CEO of the First Nations Eye Health Alliance (FNEHA), in collaboration with Shaun Tatipata, a Ngarrindjeri/Wuthathi man, Darwin local and Chair of the FNEHA Board.

Together, Lose and Shaun will present preliminary findings from this research project examining perspectives on what good eye health means for First Nations children aged 0–6 in Darwin and what services are needed to support it.

2.

First Nations Visual Acuity Chart Design, an initiative of the “Sight and Smiles” project

Presenter **Ms Jessica Curnuck and Associate Professor Khyber Alam**

This presentation outlines the development and validation of a culturally responsive visual acuity chart designed in partnership with Aboriginal communities. Recognising the limitations of standard English letter-based charts in culturally diverse settings, the project incorporated familiar Indigenous animal footprints – emu, possum, dingo, and turtle – to support culturally safe and patient-centred eye care.

The study assessed repeatability, agreement with commercially available charts, and sensitivity to refractive blur. Findings demonstrated no significant difference in performance between the new chart and existing clinical standards, supporting its potential application in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health settings and broader culturally responsive healthcare practice.

3.

Optometry Australia's Commitment Statement: Supporting the Development of a Culturally Safe Optometry Profession

Presenter **Nicola Anstice**

Optometry Australia's Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) concluded in November 2024. In reflecting on the progress made under the terms of the RAP, Optometry Australia (OA) decided to pursue a Commitment Statement, designed to expand the structure of a RAP to support OA's responsive to Ahpra's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Cultural Safety Strategy and the Shared Code of Conduct, promoting safe and effective practise, and culturally appropriate care for all. This Commitment Statement was developed over the following twelve months and was launched in November 2025. Upon its launch, OA partnered with the First Nations Eye Health Alliance to convene a First Nations-led workshop, to discuss implementation and operationalisation of the Commitment Statement. The recommendations of this workshop – spanning accountability, transparency, partnership and reciprocity – will inform the development and implementation of an operational plan, embedding the Commitment into all aspects of OA's core business. This oral presentation will speak to the development of the Commitment Statement, lessons learned and the pathway forward.

1.

The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital - Committed to Delivering in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health

Presenters: Brendon Gardner, Natalie Tieri, Renee Chmielewski, Rosie Dawkins

The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital is the Victorian statewide tertiary eye hospital, and has a longstanding commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health. An important aspect of this work is that the commitment to this work in the hospital is from senior leadership, and throughout the hospital. The hospital CEO, Brendon Gardner, will deliver this paper outlining key initiatives including:

1. Development of an expanded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.
2. Partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations in Victoria, and delivery of services off-site at ACCHOs.
3. Mainstream workforce development including cultural safety training, asking the question, NAIDOC and Reconciliation Day activities.
4. Administrative changes in waitlist management such as streamlining care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, accompaniment of patients during hospital visits.
5. Improvements in cultural safety through changes in the physical spaces in the hospital.

2.

How South Australia Eliminated blinding Trachoma as a public health problem

Presenters: Sharon Bilney & Carlos Hernandez

Trachoma, caused by ocular infection with Chlamydia Trachomatis, is the world's leading infectious cause of blindness. South Australia's Trachoma Elimination Program has eliminated trachoma as a public health problem, reducing at-risk communities from 72 in 2009 to zero in 2025 and trachoma prevalence among Aboriginal children (5-9 years) from 17% in 2010 to 0% in 2025. Endorsed by the NTSCRG and the Commonwealth, this success reflects strong partnerships, community engagement, and adherence to the WHO SAFE strategy.

The trachoma elimination program exemplifies sustainability in public health by delivering long-term, cost-effective outcomes that benefit both current and future generations. Through early intervention, community-led education, and environmental improvements, the program has significantly reduced disease burden and future healthcare costs. By preventing blindness and improving eye health, it enhances Aboriginal people ability to participate in education, employment, and community life, contributing to economic and social resilience.

The emphasis on Aboriginal leadership, health literacy, and local capacity-building ensures that improvements are sustainable and owned by the community. As the program transitions to the post-validation phase, it fosters a skilled health workforce, responsive health system and empowered communities, securing lasting benefits for Aboriginal people.

PLENARY | CONCURRENT SESSIONS | EMPOWERING OUR PEOPLE | JIM STYNES A

3.

Improving Eye Health Outcomes on the Sunshine Coast Through Collaborative Partnerships

Presenters: Candice Pearson & Coen Keyte

This presentation highlights a collaborative initiative between the Sunshine Coast Health Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Service and Queensland University of Technology (QUT). Grounded in strong relationships, culturally safe care, and a shared commitment to improving eye-health outcomes, the partnership (now in its 15th year) brings QUT optometry students into the Health Service to work alongside the optometrist and contribute in a meaningful way.

Students participate directly in service delivery, with teaching woven into real clinical care. This hands-on approach strengthens their capability in culturally responsive practice while supporting the delivery of comprehensive eye assessments and organising glasses for community members. The model demonstrates how embedding students within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health settings enriches both learning and care.

A key achievement of the collaboration is the co-development of a CheckUP-funded surgical pathway for clients with cataract and pterygium. Developed in response to needs identified through community-based care, the pathway streamlines referral and surgical coordination to reduce wait times and improve access to sight-restoring procedures. Importantly, it replaces passive waitlist processes with active follow-up and guidance for clients, ensuring they feel supported throughout their surgical journey.

By integrating student learning, community leadership, and system-level innovation, this project demonstrates how respectful partnerships drive sustainable improvements in eye-health equity.

PLENARY | CONCURRENT SESSIONS | PROMOTING INTEGRATED HEALTH SOLUTIONS | JIM STYNES B

1.

The Indigenous and Remote Eye Health Service (IRIS) program

Presenters Georgia Bennett and Sarina Martin

The Indigenous and Remote Eye Health Service (IRIS) program carries out cataract surgery intensives in rural and remote areas across the Northern Territory. This session will discuss the IRIS program, the uniqueness of providing eye health care in a remote setting and the strength of collaborative care. It will also discuss creating educational resources and tailoring eye health through the lens of health equity.

Georgia is an Optometrist with experience delivering eye health services to remote communities across the Northern Territory. Georgia works for Vanguard Health coordinating ophthalmology program delivery in rural, remote and regional areas of the Northern Territory and Far North QLD. Georgia is the Program Manager for the Indigenous and Remote Eye Health Service (IRIS). She has experience with health education and advocacy, stakeholder engagement and coordinating programs to ensure all facets of service delivery run smoothly. Georgia is passionate about the eye health of all, particularly those living in remote and under serviced regions.

Sarina Martin is the newly appointed Indigenous Eye Health Coordinator (IEHC) within the Vanguard Health, Indigenous and Remote Eye Service (IRIS) team. Sarina has a background in nursing with over 15+ years working in hospitals (private & public), ACCHO's and the aged care sector with her main passion in palliative care nursing. Originally from WA, Sarina is of Nanda descent from her mother's side and Malgana from her father's side. She has been in Darwin for just over 12 months after relocating from Halls Creek in the Kimberley's where she was the Practice Manager at Yura Yungi Aboriginal Medical Service. Sarina is passionate about all things Aboriginal Health and has devoted herself to serving her people, advocating and helping them access better healthcare whilst putting cultural safety at the forefront.

2.

An update on the development and validation of the new Turtle visual acuity chart

Presenter Shelley Hopkins & Deb Duthie

The aim of this presentation is to provide an update on the development and validation of a new version of the Turtle chart. The original Turtle chart (Wildsoet et al, 1998) was the first chart designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; however, due to its large, printed format and two alternative forced choice design, its use has been limited. The current research project aimed to redesign the original Turtle chart to make it more practical to use in remote locations, particularly for children, with improved psychophysical measurement properties.

This presentation will provide a summary of the studies undertaken to redesign the Turtle symbol, including the co-design process with art students from a regional community. Additionally, in 2025, extensive testing of the Turtle chart was undertaken across seven regional and remote communities in Queensland at school and kindergarten-based eye assessments. Visual acuity was measured in children (kindergarten to Grade 2) using the Turtle chart and compared to the Lea symbols test (gold standard) and the Parr test (current test used by Queensland Health to screen Grade Prep children in Queensland). Early findings from this validation study will be presented.

3.

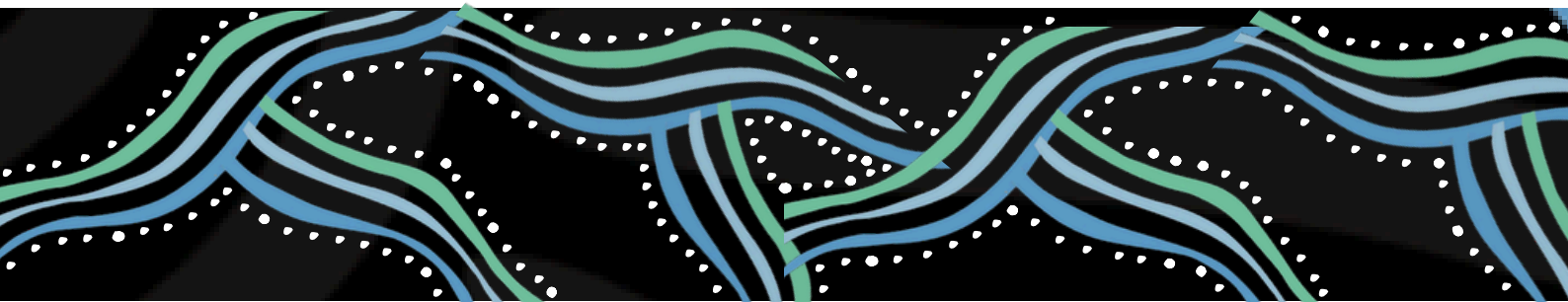
Paediatric Physiotherapy Supporting Clients with Vision Impairments

Kristy Petrie

As an Aboriginal woman working in paediatric physiotherapy, I am committed to strengthening pathways for First Nations peoples to see themselves represented and valued within the healthcare workforce. This presentation highlights my professional journey and showcases physiotherapy as a meaningful and culturally grounded career option for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

I will share insights from my work with children and young people living with cerebral visual impairment (CVI) and other vision impairments, emphasising the essential role physiotherapy plays in addressing the motor, sensory, and functional challenges related to low vision. Vision significantly influences balance, coordination, spatial awareness, and overall physical capacity. When visual information is reduced or processed differently, children rely more heavily on proprioceptive, tactile, and vestibular systems to navigate their environment. Physiotherapy supports this adaptation by strengthening alternative sensory pathways, developing safe movement strategies, and promoting participation in meaningful activities.

By weaving together professional experience and cultural identity, this presentation aims to highlight the importance of culturally safe rehabilitation and the value of First Nations leadership within specialist areas of healthcare. Ultimately, it calls for greater visibility, opportunity, and support for our mob within physiotherapy and the broader eye health sector.



Partnering for Health Equity: Our Work with First Nations Communities

Roche is deeply committed to reducing health inequities across Australia - and globally. Life-changing innovation is only meaningful if it reaches those who need it. We collaborate with governments, customers, health systems and other partners to remove barriers and advance equitable health outcomes, so patients everywhere have access to the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

We have an organisational commitment to reconciliation and a dedicated focus on the unique healthcare challenges faced by First Nations communities. We aim to establish long term partnerships and seek guidance on where our skills and capabilities can best be applied to help bridge indigenous health gaps. The concept of nothing for indigenous people, without indigenous people guides our approach.



Our Reconciliation Commitment

As an organisation, we are on a journey of reconciliation, building long-term, meaningful relationships with First Nations communities and organisations. We proudly acknowledge and respect the cultural heritage of the lands on which we operate. We are committed to identifying opportunities to empower First Nations communities, promote Indigenous businesses, and support self-determination. In collaboration with First Nations communities, our aim is to proactively advocate for long term, sustainable change.



Deepening our Cultural Awareness:

We recognise that genuine allyship requires a deep understanding and respect for First Nations culture. We have established a bespoke Cultural Awareness Training program within our organisation, featuring an impactful On Country immersion experience for all our employees to help grow their cultural knowledge and understanding. Our partnership with Jawun provides invaluable opportunities for cultural exchange, fostering meaningful relationships and strengthens our commitment to a more equitable future.

Investing in improved health outcomes: Reconciliation and improved health outcomes for First Nations peoples require genuine partnership. At Roche, we are dedicated to building meaningful relationships based on trust, respect, and a shared commitment to addressing the unique healthcare needs of First Nations peoples. We are actively engaging with First Nations communities and organisations to understand health priorities and collaborate on solutions that make a real difference. We are striving to contribute to a future where health equity is a reality for all Australians.

Our Aspiration

“Roche shares one sky with the First Nations Peoples of Australia; we walk on the same land, and in the same time. Our aspiration is to walk, listen, and journey alongside Indigenous Partners with humility, fostering equal energy and power between us.”

We endeavor as a company to ensure that our aspirations do not sit parallel to our company's other strategies, but rather that reconciliation is an integral part of everything we do. Our focus and commitment is to forge equitable outcomes for all Australian patients and the communities that surround them, addressing in particular those gaps in Indigenous Health which align with Roche's expertise, strengths and capabilities.”



**The Fred Hollows
Foundation**

The Fred Hollows Foundation works to uphold Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' right to sight, free, prior and informed consent and self-determination. This is why we partner with community-controlled organisations to enable self-determination and locally led delivery of eye health to their communities.

HOW WE WORK & OUR PARTNERS

To ensure we work alongside the community-controlled sector and utilise our strong presence in the eye health sector to uphold these values, the IAP does not work where we are not invited to ensure community organisations and leaders are calling the shots and we do not accept Government funding to ensure we are not competing with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector for resources.



Our Indigenous Australia Program (IAP)

IAP is guided by our principles to ensure we uphold our commitment to self-determination and work with integrity.

Self-determination - free prior and informed consent

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership
- Equity
- Respect
- Working Together
- Support
- Transparency and Accountability
- Patient Centred Care



Photo: Gala Dinner Awards, 2025 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference, Whadjuk Noongar Country

The First Nations Eye Health Alliance (FNEHA) is the principal voice and Australia's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye care peak body. FNEHA is a registered charity that utilises traditional and contemporary knowledge/pathways to develop equitable health approaches that stop preventable vision loss and blindness in First Nations people. FNEHA carries the vision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to see the enactment of equitable improvements in eye health and vision care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Our work contributes to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, building towards a collective national approach to empower First Nations communities so that they are healthy and flourishing.

FNEHA was born out of key discussions at the 2022 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference (NASTIEHC) on Larrakia Country in Darwin, NT where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health professionals from across the country called for a dedicated body to lead the advancements needed to improve eye health and vision care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

FNEHA provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in the eye care and vision sector along with their allies, a space to connect, learn and be supported. By becoming a member of The Alliance, you can help to strengthen First Nations leadership and voice within the eye health and vision care sector.



FNEHA Board & Secretariat 2024 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health Conference



BECOME A MEMBER

The Alliance also provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in the eye care and vision sector along with their allies, a space to connect, learn and be supported. By becoming a member of the Alliance, you can help to strengthen First Nations leadership and voice within the eye health and vision care sector.



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Guide Dogs.



THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING BURSARIES

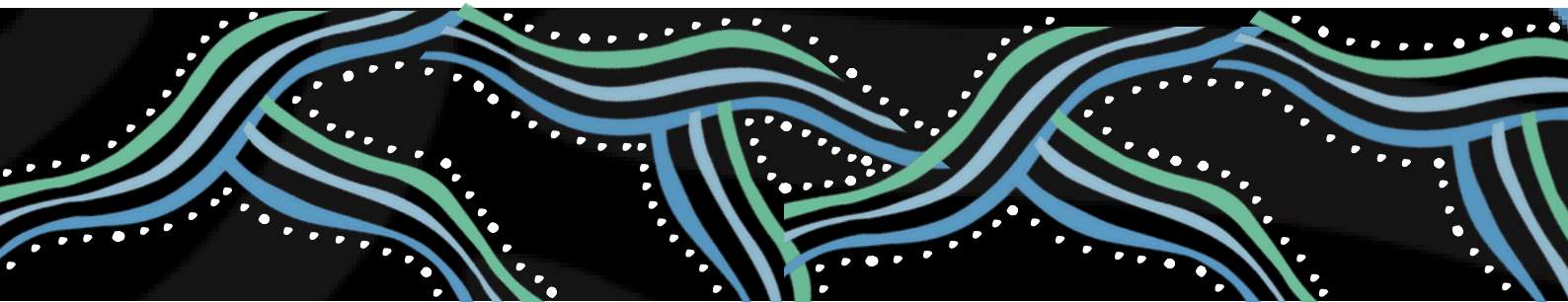
Bursaries are designed to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to take part in this important annual gathering. The applications received come from health workers, emerging leaders, and community members with an interest in eye health and vision care, seeking this unique opportunity to connect, learn, and share.

This year, we have had the opportunity to provide over 20 bursaries to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to attend, and it is thanks to the generosity of these agencies.



On behalf of the First Nations Eye Health Alliance, we thank all our sponsors and speakers for their incredible generosity in time and funding support that have made this conference possible.

We look forward to continuing to walk with you all to achieve eye health equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.





**FIRST NATIONS
EYE HEALTH ALLIANCE**

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