

This equipment and training program received funding from the Australian Government.

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **New Government funded initiative to increase eye health access for Indigenous Australians**

**Sydney Australia, 26 April 2017:** Diabetes related blindness in Aboriginal Australians is 14 times higher than in non-Indigenous populations and 94% of vision loss in Aboriginal communities is preventable or treatable (i)

These worrying facts have motivated action by the Australian Government to fund a national program providing eye health testing equipment, and also training and support for the health services using the equipment, in more than 100 sites across Australia.

This news is greatly welcomed by the eye health sector. Brien Holden Vision Institute applied to coordinate the new program *Provision of Eye Health Equipment and Training* supported by the Department of Health, and will co-lead with The Australian College of Optometry through a consortium approach with the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia, the Centre for Eye Health and Optometry Australia.

The consortium will work collaboratively to implement the integrated program with guidance from an advisory group of representatives from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health service sector. The program will run until June 2019 and will greatly increase access to detection and appropriate care of eye disease for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within Australia.

Mitasha Yu, Regional Director for Asia Pacific, Brien Holden Vision Institute said: “We are greatly motivated by this new opportunity of increased resources to continue working with the Aboriginal eye health coordinators and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services. We believe the consortium can strategically make further inroads towards the inequalities in eye care that exist within Australia, and we are grateful to the Commonwealth Government for making these funds available.”

Maureen O’Keefe, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian College of Optometry said “The supply and maintenance of eye health testing equipment in primary care clinics and training in its use, will improve access to timely detection, management and treatment of eye disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and assist in preventing avoidable blindness. We look forward to working with the consortium to address and arrest the rising rate of diabetes related blindness in these affected communities.”

The program will fund the installation of retinal cameras, aiding increased rates of

diabetic retinopathy screening by Indigenous primary health care services and supporting referral pathways for comprehensive eye examinations.

On successful completion of the training general practitioners will have developed skills to interpret images taken with the retinal camera and understand when patients need to be referred to an optometrist or ophthalmologist. Further health knowledge gained will also enable health workers in Aboriginal health services to explain the impact of undiagnosed or untreated eye health disease to the patient.

**-ENDS-**

**For more information or possible interviews with key personnel working on this program, please contact:**

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#### **Editors notes on the consortium**

**Brien Holden Vision Institute**, Public Health (formerly the International Centre for Eyecare Education) is a global non-profit, non-governmental organisation. In the last seventeen years, the Institute has delivered sustainable eye care services, education and training programs in more than 50 countries. The Institute is focused on the elimination of uncorrected vision impairment and avoidable blindness by developing eye care solutions within communities in most need, thereby improving opportunities in education, employment and quality of life. Public Health, is supported by Optometry Giving Sight and exists within the Institute as one organisation.

The **Australian College of Optometry (ACO)** is a not for profit organisation dedicated to preserving sight and preventing blindness through clinical service provision, research and education. It is Australia's leading provider of public health optometric eye care to disadvantaged communities. The ACO administers the Victorian Eyecare Service, funded by the Victorian Government to provide eye care and subsidised glasses to people in need across Victoria. The ACO operates a network of clinics and provides outreach optometry services in Victoria, and parts of NSW and SA

**Optometry Australia** is a not-for-profit organisation established in 1918 and is considered the influential voice for the optometry profession. It is a profession-centric membership body representing about 90 per cent of Australian optometrists. The goal of Optometry Australia and its affiliated state-based membership bodies is to actively strengthen, protect and promote the profession of optometry and eye-health, on behalf of all optometrists.

**Centre for Eye Health (CFEH)** is an initiative of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and the

University of New South Wales. It is Australia's first eye-care facility to offer an extensive range of advanced eye imaging and visual system diagnostic services to the general community, at no charge to the patient or the referring professional. By providing a comprehensive range of tests in one location, CFEH aims to reduce preventable blindness by identifying eye disease before irreversible vision loss occurs.

The **Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia** (AHCSA) is a membership-based state peak body for community controlled Aboriginal health in South Australia. With a leadership, watchdog, advocacy and sector support role and a commitment to Aboriginal self-determination, it represents the expertise, needs and aspirations of Aboriginal communities at regional, state and national levels based on a holistic perspective of health. The AHCSA's core operations include direct coordination and delivery of some secondary health care services, a range of community health and education programs, and ongoing member support in advocacy, governance, accreditation and capacity building. As a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) the AHCSA delivers culturally appropriate, nationally accredited tertiary education, including Certificates III and IV in Primary Health Care.

(i) Taylor, HR, J Xie, S Fox, RA Dunn, AL Arnold and JE Keeffe. 'The Prevalence and Causes of Vision Loss in Indigenous Australians: The National Indigenous Eye Health Survey'. *Medical Journal of Australia* 192, (2010): 312–318