VISION 2020 THE RIGHT TO SIGHT AUSTRALIA

DFAT Soft Power Review

Inclusive Eye Health and Vision Care as a Soft Power Asset

October 2018

National body working in partnership to prevent avoidable blindness and improve vision care

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Summary of Recommendations

1. The Australian Government should raise Official Development Assistance funding to 0.7% of Gross National Income by 2030 to enhance Australian influence in the Indo-Pacific.
2. That the Australian Government expands eye health investment in the Indo-Pacific to continue to foster and expand on the essential interpersonal linkages that provide strong soft power opportunities for Australia.
3. Australia continues to provide leadership on eye health in the Indo-Pacific to help protect the significant gains that have been made and strive for the elimination of avoidable blindness.
4. The Australian Government explores the implementation of new inclusive eye health programs to build upon previous successes in the Indo-Pacific.
5. The Australian Government continues to collaborate with the eye health sector to further the reach of technological advancements in artificial intelligence and tele-ophthalmology into the Indo-Pacific.
6. The Australian Government expand its focus to respond to the emerging health trends of myopia and non-communicable diseases in the Indo-Pacific to effectively utilise the significant soft power asset of the Australian health sector.

Introduction and context

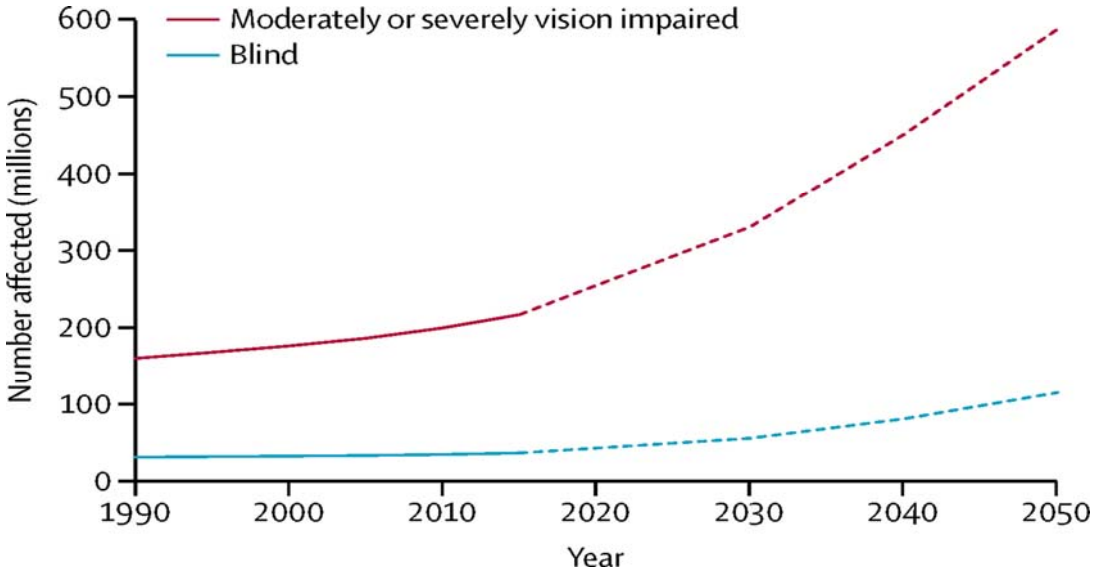
Vision 2020 Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Soft Power review. This submission highlights how Australian investments in inclusive eye health and vision care services can strongly contribute to Australia's soft power and influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Australian aid sector is uniquely positioned to help facilitate the transfer of Australian values and ideals, through the strong interpersonal linkages generated by the sector's achievements. Well-targeted aid is a cost-effective means of exercising geopolitical leadership in line with key Australian values and areas of strength. It is a crucial pillar in supporting the achievement of overall foreign policy objectives and a critical aspect of Australian influence in the region.

In addition to delivering strong social and economic benefits, past Australian eye health aid initiatives have demonstrated how such efforts build goodwill with partner countries in the Indo-Pacific supported by the generosity of the Australian public. This submission will use the example of eye health investments to highlight the very practical gains made through past investments and the potential benefits that future investment could deliver.

Overview – global vision impairment

Currently, there are 253 million people in the world who have moderate to severe vision impairment[1] and the number of people with vision impairment has been steadily growing as populations age and the prevalence of chronic diseases increases. Over the next 30 years, the prevalence of vision impairment is expected to treble by 2050.



Source: Magnitude, Temporal Trends, and Projections of the Global Prevalence of Blindness and Distance and Near Vision Impairment 2017

[1] Bourne, R, Flaxman, S, Braithwaite, T et al. *Magnitude, Temporal Trends, and Projections of the Global Prevalence of Blindness and Distance and Near Vision Impairment: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis*, The Lancet Global Health 2017, 5(9): 888-897, https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(17)30293-0/fulltext.

Rates of vision impairment in the Indo-Pacific remain at unacceptably high levels, with an estimated 160 million people with moderate to severe vision impairment[2]. If no action is taken, the number of people in the Indo-Pacific with vision impairment is set to increase to approximately 170 million by 2020, and then grow exponentially to an estimated 440 million by 2050[3].

While these numbers are concerning it is estimated that over 80% of the world's vision impairment is avoidable. This means that in the Indo-Pacific alone, roughly 130 million people are needlessly vision impaired[4]. There are established, effective and low cost actions that can be taken to remedy this, with Australian aid funded eye health and vision care initiatives providing a cost effective soft power asset that generate $4 AUD in economic growth for every $1 AUD invested[5].

The practical impacts of addressing this issue, in particular the strong good will and social and economic benefits for the affected countries and thus Australia's influence, are striking. If the Australian aid program effectively targets avoidable blindness and vision impairment, it will strengthen Australia's reputation as having a leading health system and a willingness to transfer our knowledge and share innovations with our partners in the Indo-Pacific.

Generosity and Australia Aid

The use of targeted Australian aid complements Australia's broader investment policies and further develops strong regional relations that increase influence in the Indo-Pacific. This presents the Australian Government with an opportunity, through foreign policy, to use aid as a strategic lever alongside diplomacy, trade and security. Australian aid remains a critical and cost-effective tool for advancing Australia's interests in the region, enabling the alleviation of poverty and improving regional security by addressing health outcomes and the underlying social determinant factors amongst the world's poorest.

In economically uncertain times, in which other countries are considering their investments in the region, it is strategically important for Australia to continue to provide highly visible leadership in the Indo-Pacific region. To underpin Australia's national brand of generosity,

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[2] Op. Cit. Bourne R, et al. 2017

[3] Op. Cit. Bourne R, et al. 2017

[4] International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, *IAPB Vision Atlas: Regional Estimates of Distance-Vision Loss* 2017, http://atlas.iapb.org/global-burden-vision-impairment/gbvi-regional-estimates-of-distance-vision-loss/.

[5] PricewaterhouseCoopers, *Investing in Vision: The Costs and Benefits of Ending Avoidable Blindness* 2014, https://www.hollows.org/getattachment/au/What-We-Do/Ending-Avoidable-blindness/Research/PwC-Investing-in-Vision.pdf.aspx.

Australia's aid funding should be raised incrementally to 0.7% of Gross National Income by 2030, a figure that has been endorsed in the Addis Ababa Agreement[6].

Increasing aid will not just deliver on the ground benefits for local systems and people, but will also contribute to Australia's ability to influence security in the Indo-Pacific by underpinning strong bilateral relationships. Trends over recent years have seen a significant reduction in the overall level of support for aid that, if not reversed, has the potential to hinder Australia's ability to influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Australia's national "brand" is a strong marketing tool, built on the values of a fair go and generosity. An inclusive aid program that enhances the economic capacity of close trading partners and regional neighbours also protects Australia's security and prosperity.

Recommendation

The Australian Government should raise Official Development Assistance funding to 0.7% of Gross National Income by 2030 to enhance Australian influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Interpersonal linkages

Australia's ability to persuade and influence, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, is driven by strong interpersonal linkages. These have been fostered through many years of collaboration between Australia and its neighbours through the Australian non-governmental international development sector, with the support of the Government's aid program.

Within this environment, the eye health and vision care sector has actively contributed to and supported development of Australia's regional leadership, particularly through the delivery of the Australian Government's Avoidable Blindness Initiative[7] (**Attachment 1)**.

The Avoidable Blindness Initiative began in 2009 and delivered numerous eye health programs in the Indo-Pacific until 2017; this allowed for the development of extensive interpersonal linkages and enhanced Australia's reputation as a global leader in eye health. The Avoidable Blindness Initiative effectively highlighted Australia's position as a trusted partner that can help deliver sustainable growth and development in the Indo-Pacific.

Through the Avoidable Blindness Initiative, Australian eye health non-government organisations (NGOs) supported regional training facilities such as the Pacific Eye Institute in Fiji[8]. This sustainable local approach promoted the independence of Pacific nations and allowed for the development of tailored educational courses and appropriate services to respond to the Pacific's unique eye health needs. It also promoted regional interpersonal linkages and empowered

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[6] United Nations, *Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on financing for Development* 2015, http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/ffd3/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/07/Addis-Ababa-Action-Agenda-Draft-Outcome-Document-7-July-2015.pdf.

[7] International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, *The Australian Governments Avoidable Blindness Initiative* 2014, https://www.iapb.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Australian-Governments-Avoidable-Blindness-Initiative_Vision-2020-Australia.pdf.

[8] The Pacific Eye Institute, *The Pacific Eye Institute: What We Do* 2018, http://www.pacificeyeinstitute.org/.

Pacific eye health professionals through capacity building enterprises. The support of local and regional institutions created enduring partnerships between the Australian organisations that help support them and the local workforce that they create. They expand Australia's influence in the region by demonstrating the positive and strong effect of Australia's generosity.

Restoring the sight of someone with avoidable blindness or vision impairment is an empowering intervention that can remove systemic drivers of poverty and inequality. Australia has demonstrated the expertise, passion and determination that is required to facilitate sustainable eye health outcomes in the Indo-Pacific. However, there are still significant opportunities to promote further growth and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and there is a need to act now to counter the forecast trebling of impairment that will occur if action is not taken.

Recommendation

That the Australian Government expands eye health investment in the Indo-Pacific to continue to foster and expand on the essential interpersonal linkages that provide strong soft power opportunities for Australia.

Australia's role in supporting eye health in the Indo-Pacific

There has been significant discussion and focus on the changing power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific and how Australia might adapt to these new changes as they emerge. Australia is still the largest provider of aid to the region and is regarded as the most reliable and trusted partner to countries in the region[9]. Australia can build on this reputation and further develop mutual trust and collaborative partnerships.

Organisations such as the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) are two influential multilateral organisations through which Australia can project influence in the Indo-Pacific. The WHO is preparing to release the World Report on Vision (WROV), a report that aims to provide authoritative evidence on the magnitude of vision loss globally, as well as its prevention, treatment and rehabilitation[10]. Among the recommendations to Governments in the report, several will focus on ensuring comprehensive and integrated vision services within countries through the creation of strategies and budgets that seek to integrate eye care into the mainstream health system. The release of the WROV gives the Australian Government the opportunity to display the tremendous work that has been done to combat avoidable blindness in the Indo-Pacific and reaffirm the leadership role that has been created by the achievements of Australian aid.

Eye health is an important contributor towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Australia can demonstrate global leadership by aligning investments with the SDGs. Healthy vision connects to and impacts upon many other areas of life, such as education, employment and community participation. As such, the provision of eye health and vision care can drive systemic change across numerous SDGs including those related to poverty,

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[9] Lowy Institute, *Lowy Institute Pacific Aid Map* 2018, https://pacificaidmap.lowyinstitute.org/.

[10] WHO, *World Report on Vision*, Blindness and Vision Impairment Prevention 2018, http://www.who.int/blindness/vision-report/en/.

gender equality, quality education and reduced inequalities. Australia is uniquely positioned to help deliver on all of the SDGs and ensure that the Goals guiding principle of 'no-one left behind' is realised in the Indo-Pacific.

The decline in Australian aid in recent years threatens to diminish achievements made thus far, particularly at this time when the number of people at risk of vision impairment is forecasted to rise. Population growth and ageing is an issue for public policy across the board and eye health is no exception. As Australia is seeking to further establish its leadership role in the Indo-Pacific, there is the opportunity to draw upon past successes and champion the effort to help combat avoidable blindness.

Recommendation

Australia must continue to provide leadership on eye health in the Indo-Pacific to help protect the significant gains that have been made and strive for the elimination of avoidable blindness.

Capacity building

Sustainable capacity building programs are central to the work undertaken by the eye health and vision care sector, through sharing the expertise, experience and systems that promote the local development of eye health workforces in the Indo-Pacific. The Australian Government's past support for the Avoidable Blindness Initiative reinforced Australia's reputation as an effective development partner and a global leader in international development.

The East Asia Vision Program (EAVP), delivered by the Vision 2020 Australia Global Consortium and partners, demonstrates how inclusive aid programming can positively influence regional relationships. Over a three year period, 277 new eye health professionals were trained, including ophthalmologists, cataract surgeons, ophthalmic nurses, orientation and mobility specialists and spectacle technicians[11]. This training targeted countries most in need and happen to be of significant strategic interest to Australia (Cambodia, Vietnam and Timor-Leste).

Focusing on more than just health providers, the EAVP also provided training to school health staff and teachers to identify and screen for refractive errors. This is significant because uncorrected refractive error accounts for over 50% of vision impairment in the Indo-Pacific region[12], and is easily treated through low cost interventions such as spectacles. Left uncorrected, refractive error represents a substantial barrier to educational and socio-economic mobility for low and middle-income countries[13]. The act of restoring sight provides proof of

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[11] Bell, V, *Global Consortium East Asia Vision Program: Eye Health Workforce Development and Training Evaluative Review* 2016, http://www.vision2020australia.org.au/uploads/resource/242/EAVP-Combined-Completion-and-Year-Three-Annual-Report_submission_Report-and-annexes_Final_for-website.pdf.

[12] Flaxman, S, Bourne, R, Resinkoff, S et al. *Global Causes of Blindness and Distance Vision Impairment 1990-2020: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis*, The Lancet Global Health 2017, 5(12): 1221-1234, https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(17)30393-5/fulltext.

[13] Hannum, E and Zhang, Y, *Poverty and Proximate Barriers to Learning: Vision Deficiencies, Vision Correction and Educational Outcomes in Rural Northwest China,* World Development 2012, 40(9): 1921-1931, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4655323/.

Australia's leadership as well as supporting empowerment for those who have experienced vision loss.

To guarantee the sustainability and stability of the EAVP, the Ministries of Health in each country were actively involved in the process and all actions were aligned with national eye health policies and frameworks. Extensive actions were also undertaken to develop relationships with local stakeholders to foster local ownership and utilise expertise when designing program activities. Aligning objectives with national priorities guarantees that programs delivered serve the interests and needs of the local population. This demonstrates Australia's leadership in the Indo-Pacific and is viewed as a significant strength and asset by regional neighbours.

Inclusive aid programming can also build capacity for countries to tackle complex social and human rights issues, including the empowerment of women and girls, and disability inclusiveness and participation. Women are disproportionately affected by blindness and vision loss, accounting for approximately 55% of all people who are blind globally[14]. There are systemic social and economic barriers that prevent women and girls from accessing eye care in the Indo-Pacific. The EAVP encouraged greater participation in both the training and screening for women in Cambodia, Vietnam and Timor-Leste. Over half of the eye health professionals who were trained in the program were women, increasing both their earning capacity and the likelihood of women and girls accessing appropriate screening and health professionals when seeking treatment for vision loss[15]. Programs aimed at empowerment can strengthen Australia's reputation in the Indo-Pacific and across the globe.

Australia's continued efforts to provide economic and social empowerment to the Indo-Pacific, expands the influence and connections with countries in the region. Australia can continue to demonstrate leadership in this way.

Recommendation

The Australian Government explores the implementation of new inclusive eye health programs to build upon previous successes in the Indo-Pacific.

Research, science and technological advancement

Australia is a leader in research, science and technological advancement, including that in the field of eye health[16]. The exporting and harnessing of these advancements can provide benefits to the health outcomes of regional neighbours and is an important soft power asset.

The rise of telemedicine, which is the use of advanced telecommunication technologies to exchange health information and provide health care services across geographic, time, social

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[14] Bourne, R, Flaxman, S, Braithwaite, T et al. *Magnitude, Temporal Trends, and Projections of the Global Prevalence of Blindness and Distance and Near Vision Impairment: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis*, The Lancet Global Health 2017, 5(9): 888-897, https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(17)30293-0/fulltext.

[15] Op. Cit. Bell, V 2016.

[16] The Centre for World University Rankings, *Ophthalmology Rankings* 2017, https://cwur.org/2017/subjects.php#Ophthalmology.

and cultural barriers[17], has had a profound effect on how eye health initiatives can be delivered in low resource remote settings.

Advances in tele-ophthalmology, for example, can be utilised to help provide quality eye care to under-served urban populations and the unserved remote rural populations in low resource settings across the globe[18]. This has helped overcome the barriers of accessibility that prevent people from accessing the services they require. These advances can allow for more prompt diagnosis and formulation of treatment plans for numerous eye diseases including diabetic retinopathy and cataract, as well as low vision testing, improving patient access and outcomes[19]. As Australian expertise continues to develop in this field, we have the capacity and capability to provide training and greater access to health professionals in the Indo-Pacific. The increasing interconnectedness of Australian and Pacific health workforces has the potential to establish and promote the interpersonal relationships required to strengthen Australian influence.

Artificial intelligence is also opening new avenues of treating increasingly prevalent non-communicable diseases such as diabetes mellitus. Irreversible vision impairment from diabetic complications is now the leading cause of new cases of blindness in the world. If the disease is detected early and treated appropriately, diabetic retinopathy is treatable in 98 per cent of cases[20].

To help combat this growing problem the Centre for Eye Research Australia (CERA), in collaboration with national eye care programmes in the region and the Fred Hollows Foundation, are developing an artificial intelligence diagnostic assistance system (the system).

The system analyses high quality pictures to diagnose blinding conditions such as diabetic retinopathy and several other leading causes of preventable blindness[21]. In remote low-resource areas of the Indo-Pacific, the system has the potential to reach people outside of urban centres who do not have access to either optometrists or ophthalmologists. The system can diagnose eye diseases with 91.9 per cent accuracy[22], providing a verifiable and trustworthy service to people outside of easily accessed geographical locations.

With technological advancements in both artificial intelligence and medical imaging, the Australian eye health and vision care community is uniquely positioned to revolutionise and increase the accessibility of sight saving medical treatment and diagnoses into the Indo-Pacific.

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[17] Department of Health, *Telehealth* 2015, http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/e-health-telehealth.

[18] Sreelatha, O and Ramesh, S, *Teleophthalmology: Improving Patient Outcomes*?, Clinical Ophthalmology 2016, 10: 285-295, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4755429/.

[19] Prathiba, V and Rema, M, *Teleophthalmology: A Model for Eye Care Delivery in Rural and Underserved Areas of India,* International Journal of Family Medicine 2011, https://www.hindawi.com/journals/ijfm/2011/683267/.

[20] Vision 2020 Australia, Diabetes Australia, Centre for Eye Research Australia, *The Case for an Australian Diabetes Blindness Prevention Initiative* 2017, https://static.diabetesaustralia.com.au/s/fileassets/diabetes-australia/0b771704-2c02-4211-8cf6-b15982da01bb.pdf.

[21] Centre for Eye Research Australia, *Artificial-Intelligence Based Eye Screening to Prevent Blindness in Remote Low-Resource Settings* 2017, https://vimeo.com/213961450/f9e15f08ae.

[22] Op. Cit. Centre for Eye Research Australia, 2017.

This will improve the quality of life for countless people and help preserve and deliver Australia's own national interests in the region. While fulfilling Australia's international and moral obligations, this will frame Australia as a regional leader capable of providing greater economic and social security throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Recommendation

That the Australian Government continues to collaborate with the eye health sector to further the reach of technological advancements in artificial intelligence and tele-ophthalmology into the Indo-Pacific.

Guarding against the increasing prevalence of myopia and non-communicable diseases such as diabetic retinopathy

The commitment by the Australian Government to respond to emerging health trends in the Indo-Pacific is a strong soft power asset and promotes Australia's national interests in the region. Australia's health system is widely regarded as one of the best in the world and responding to emerging health crises outside the sole remit of infectious diseases provides another soft power influence.

Myopia

The prevalence of myopia, more commonly referred to as short-sightedness, is increasing at an alarming rate in both the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea. In a study of school-aged children in the Chinese province of Guangzhou, over 50 per cent of children between the ages of 13 to 15 years old were identified as living with myopia, with some not accessing treatment[23]. The global figures are expected to continue to rise exponentially as well, with some forecasting that over 4.5 billion people are expected to be diagnosed with myopia in 2050[24]. This alarming increase in prevalence will have implications for the planning and delivering of services that are required to manage and prevent potential blinding myopic complications. The Australian eye health and vision care sector is positioned to help lead efforts in combatting this growing area of need.

Diabetic Retinopathy

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are a developing crisis in the Indo-Pacific and are now the leading cause of death in Pacific island nations[25]. The increasing impact of NCDs has a direct correlation with higher levels of preventable blindness and vision impairment and worsening

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[23] Guo, L, Yang, J, Mai, J, Guo, Y, Li, P, Yue, Y, Tang, D, Lu, C and Zhang, W-H, *Prevalence and Associated Factors of Myopia Among Primary and Middle School-Aged Students: A School-Based Study in Guangzhou,* The Scientific Journal of The Royal College of Ophthalmology 2016, 30(6): 796-804, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4906452/.

[24] Holden, B, Fricke, T, Wilson, D, Jong, M, Naidoo, K, Sankaridung, P, Wong, T, Naduvilath, T, Resnikoff, S, *Global Prevalence of Myopia and High Myopia and Temporal Trends from 2000 through 2050,* American Academy of Ophthalmology 2016, 123(5): 1036-1042, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26875007.

[25] WHO, *Non-communicable Diseases in the Pacific*, Division of Pacific Technical Support 2018, http://www.wpro.who.int/southpacific/programmes/healthy_communities/noncommunicable_diseases/page/en/.

health outcomes. Diabetic retinopathy is on the rise as populations age and lifestyle factors contribute to the increase of the prevalence of NCDs. Australia has extensive experience in delivering health promotion campaigns and initiatives to build local workforce capacity which would have a profound impact on quality of life across the Indo-Pacific.

Australia's continued commitment to combat emerging transmittable diseases should be commended, however as NCDs continue to have a debilitating impact on the lives of many in the region, a new focus is required to effectively respond to the emerging increased rates of myopia and NCDs. The Australian health sector is world renowned and a significant soft power asset that can be utilised to help neighbouring countries respond to the rise of debilitating diseases and conditions.

Recommendation

The Australian Government expand its focus to respond to the emerging health trends of myopia and non-communicable diseases in the Indo-Pacific to effectively utilise the significant soft power asset of the Australian health sector.

Conclusion

The delivery of inclusive eye health programming into the Indo-Pacific is a significant soft power asset that provides regional leadership and extends Australia's influence. The eye health and vision care sector has built extensive interpersonal linkages throughout the region, which has furthered Australia's reputation as a leader and a trusted partner in the Indo-Pacific.

Through collaborative partnerships between the Australian Government and the eye health and vision care sector, significant gains have been made in improving eye health outcomes in the region. However, as populations continue to age and the incidences of myopia and non-communicable diseases continue to rise these gains are at risk of being lost unless further action is taken. Australia has the opportunity, through funding capacity building initiatives, technological advancements and regional leadership, to prevent this backsliding from occurring, by leveraging our eye health expertise and capability as a soft power asset in the region and across the globe.

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Achieving the Global Action Plan for Universal Eye Health through sector-led coordination and collaboration.

April 2016 – May 2017

Background

Vision 2020 Australia, with support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), invested in building an effective model that strengthens sector-led coordination and collaboration in the Vision 2020 Australia Global Consortium which was borne out of the Australian Government's Avoidable Blindness Initiative.

With no ongoing financial commitments to implement joint programs as a Consortium in 2016, Vision 2020 Australia, the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), and member organisations agreed to leverage existing resources, expertise and opportunities to continue building on the increased sector collaboration that the Global Consortium created.

FOCUS ON SECTOR-LED COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION

The sector recognised the significant improvement that had been achieved. It was also recognised that investment in ongoing facilitation of collaborative opportunities remained a priority to support continued development and sector outcomes.

In 2016, Vision 2020 Australia continued to work in partnership with IAPB and members to strengthen the depth of collaboration with other international Australian and non-Australian non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local in-country NGOs, the private sector and national governments, with the support of the Australian Government.

PRIORITY COUNTRIES

Vietnam, Cambodia and Papua New Guinea were selected as priority countries based on their involvement in previous Global Consortium programs, the number of Vision 2020 Australia members engaged and the potential to achieve maximum impact with limited resources in a short period of time.

PURPOSE

This program was centred on facilitating opportunities and an environment for in-country sector stakeholders to identify outcome priorities in line with National Strategies and Plans, particularly those having a catalysing effect on addressing avoidable blindness and vision loss in each country. The aim was to support each country sector, to identify opportunities for collaboration and partnerships, and to leverage existing resources and support to achieve the identified priorities.

Key outcome

Strengthened coordination and collaboration with a broader spectrum of stakeholders at country level, including other health sector NGOs, private sector organisations and representatives, a range of relevant areas of government, institutional donors and the World Health Organisation (WHO), maximising potential impacts on reducing the prevalence of avoidable blindness.

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Program activity areas



VIETNAM

Consultations and workshops around the 'National Strategy for the Prevention of Blindness to 2020 with a Vision to 2030' (National Blindness Prevention Strategy) brought all stakeholders together to identify different stakeholder inputs and follow-up actions to support its implementation.

Vietnam key outcomes:

> Approval of the National Blindness Prevention Strategy

> Improved coordination across the eye health sector for the promotion of key messaging, awareness raising and educational material, events and campaign content

> Raising awareness on the need for broadened insurance coverage for the eye health sector

> Development and implementation of school eye health policy guidelines



PAPUA NEW GUINEA (PNG)

Engagement of all eye health sector stakeholders helped improve coordination of work in-country aligned to the WHO Global Action Plan and secure better integration of eye health within the broader health system.

PNG key outcomes:

> Strengthening collaborative approaches for data collection and information sharing (i.e. successful Rapid Assessment of Avoidable Blindness (RAAB) undertaken)

> Integration of the National Eye Health Strategy into the Department of Health planning

> Defining, assessing needs, and planning of cadres within the eye health sector

- Strengthening of ophthalmology training through scoping of existing training facilities and engagement of regional training institutions to support the University of Papua New Guinea in reviewing the current curriculum
- Commencement of scoping for an optometry school in the University of PNG



CAMBODIA

Support to the Cambodian National Program for Eye Health (NPEH) to improve stakeholder coordination regarding the implementation of the soon to be endorsed new National Eye Health Strategic Plan (NEHSP) 2016-2020.

Consultation and planning process for program delivery with multiple stakeholders, particularly around the Australian Government supported Ophthalmology Residency Program.

Cambodia key outcomes:

> Funding the development of the new NEHSP 2016-2020

> Strengthened organisational capacity of the NPEH

Gender and disability inclusiveness

Gender and people with a disability were a cross-cutting issue in all activities and discussions. An example of this successful approach can be seen in Cambodia where the Eye Health Sectoral Committee is now working with the Women's Ministry to address gender issues in the eye health sector.

Innovation

Sector coordination enabled to create space for innovation through sharing of information, experiences and exploring new partnership opportunities, including with the private sector. In the long term, innovative partnerships and collaborative approaches will be critical to strengthen the delivery and impact of eye health and vision care services in the Asia-Pacific region. For example, PNG was one of the first countries to collect RAAB data on smartphones.

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