Vision 2020 Australia submission to Health Policy Analysis (HPA) regarding the Evaluation of Outreach Programs

April 2022

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Introduction

Vision 2020 Australia is pleased to have the opportunity to provide feedback to Health Policy Analysis (HPA) for the Evaluation of the Outreach Eyecare Programs conducted for the Australian Government Department of Health.

Our members recognize the key role that outreach programs play in supporting access to health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples nationwide, and for achieving our shared goal of ending avoidable blindness by 2025.[1]

A review of eye health outreach program guidelines was a key recommendation of the *Strong Eyes, Strong Communities: a five year plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health and vision* to address the practical barriers and increase the effectiveness of those programs.

As a background to this document, Vision 2020 Australia also provided feedback to Australian Government Department of Health on the Revised Outreach Service Delivery Standards and Reporting Template in August 2020.[2] That submission contained 13 recommendations which reflected our consultation with organisations actively involved in the planning, delivery and promotion of eye health outreach programs.

It is our hope that this document, together with our August 2020 Submission and feedback provided by individual organisations during the consultation process, will be considered by HPA in its final evaluation report to the Department of Health, with the aim of supporting the increased effectiveness and direction of the future of eye health outreach programs in Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and self-determination

Vision 2020 Australia and our members strongly support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' right to shape the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs aimed to improve their life outcomes, as outlined in The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (July 2020).[3]

We call for greater engagement, co-design and shared decision-making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations; as well as investment in strengthening the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Sector.

Design and implementation of outreach programs must also incorporate patient (and other end-user) perspectives, to ensure responsive, culturally-appropriate and integrated people-centred care is delivered.[4]

Indigenous Data Sovereignty

Outreach programs design must incorporate stronger data ownership and sharing requirements to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and organisations have access to, and

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[1] Australia's Long Term National Health Plan, Aug 2019, p7
[2] Vision 2020 Australia Feedback on the Revised Outreach Service Delivery Standards and Reporting Template, Aug 2020
[3] National Agreement on Closing the Gap, July 2020, p2
[4] World Health Organisation (WHO): Integrated, people-centred eye care, including preventable blindness and impaired vision (who.int), Dec 2019

capability to use locally-relevant data to set, drive and monitor activities relevant to their health and well-being.

Vision 2020 Australia and our members strongly support Indigenous data sovereignty and the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to exercise ownership, governance and access over Indigenous data to set, drive and monitor their own development and priorities (as outlined in National Agreement on Closing the Gap).[5, 6]

Transparency in Needs Assessment, Decision Making and Governance Processes

Current Outreach Programs Service Delivery Standards require jurisdictional fundholders to conduct annual Needs Assessments to identify priority needs and locations within their jurisdiction.[7]

Feedback from the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector and our members indicates this process is frequently opaque and insufficiently responsive. Therefore, improved transparency in needs determination, date, decision making, service planning and service design is required.

Program design must also be geared towards data and demand-driven best practice models, where resources are allocated in accordance with population and community priorities and needs to ensure equity of access for all Australians, regardless of jurisdiction and remoteness.

Similarly, jurisdictional Outreach Advisory Fora must have greater involvement of (and meaningful engagement with) Aboriginal Community Control Health sector in the decision-making process to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's self-determination, priority setting and leadership.

We would also recommend exploring opportunities to streamline delivery and administrative requirements for outreach services funded through multiple outreach funding streams, to improve efficiency and reduce the reporting burdens on ACCHOs and service providers.

Monitoring and evaluation parameters and measures for outreach programs must be co-designed with community/ACCHO input to reflect priorities and outcomes that are meaningful to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Leveraging the current Outreach Programs Evaluation to undertake a broader strategic planning process for the future of outreach programs

With the current outreach eye care programs funded until 2024, Vision 2020 Australia and our members feel the opportunity is now for the Commonwealth Department of Health to develop a vision and strategic plan for the future of eye care service delivery in Australia.

Such strategic planning process should include consultations with all relevant key stakeholders, including: clients (and their support networks), community, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Sector, eye care service providers/professional bodies, jurisdictional fundholders and governments of all levels.

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[5] Kukutai, T. Taylor, J. (Ed.). (2016) *Indigenous data sovereignty: toward an agenda*. Canberra: ANU Press. (page xxii)
[6] Walter M, Lovett R, Bodkin-Andrews G and Lee V, Indigenous Data Sovereignty Communique, Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit, Canberra, 20 June 2018
[7] Outreach Programs Service Delivery Standards (Australia Department of Health), October 2020, p4

The purview of this broader strategic planning process should encompass:

- A holistic and strategic review and future planning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye care services, including outreach programs, PHNs and ITC funding;
- Design of best-practice, population and data driven models of service delivery, including ACCHO-controlled and permanently embedded services, or, where this is not appropriate, co-designed outreach models;
- Investment into the development of the community-controlled sector, with a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and regional and rural workforce;
- Focus on structuring systems for effective recruitment, development and retention of eye care sector workforce to ensure outreach service delivery is adequately resourced, sustainable, equitable and accessible into the future;
- Investment in local coordination and case management to maximise the effectiveness of available outreach and other services and build effective local pathways to care;
- Review and embedding of meaningful nationally-consistent monitoring and evaluation frameworks, as well as agile and responsive governance structures.

Vision 2020 Australia and our members stand ready to work together with the Australian Government Department of Health and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Sector to help shape the future of eye care service delivery to achieve our shared goal of ending avoidable blindness in Australia.