

The IDEAS Initiative



Over the age of 40 years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have six times the rate of blindness of other Australians. 94% of vision loss in Indigenous Australians is preventable or treatable.

“Queensland Health has provided \$5 million to Diamond Jubilee Partnerships Ltd. (a subsidiary of the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust Australia) for an innovative project to substantially reduce blindness and visual impairment amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with diabetes in Queensland.” The Minister for Health, the Honourable Lawrence Springborg launched the project on December 10th 2013.

Queensland Aboriginal & Islander Health Council is a major partner in this Initiative that aims to reduce preventable blindness from diabetes by providing education, equipment and specialist clinical treatment and support to 19 Aboriginal Medical Services in Queensland. Of that number, eight sites are regional hubs located in Toowoomba, Charleville, Mt Isa, Townsville, Cairns, Mackay, Rockhampton and Hervey Bay. Another seven remote sites will be visited 2-4 times a year. A partnership with the Royal Flying Doctor Service will expand the scope of this Initiative and help tap into 14 rural and remote areas across the State of Queensland.

The Initiative aims to close the health gap for Indigenous and remote communities by providing a visiting service that gives access to first class specialist services in the familiar cultural surrounds of a Community Controlled Health Service thus improving compliance and health outcomes. The Initiative will build a working partnership with all participants involved in the delivery of health services to Indigenous people in Queensland where good work is already being done to close the health gap.

The IDEAS Van will travel to the eight regional hubs around Queensland, every 4-8 weeks with some guest visits 2-4 times a year allowing remote towns to experience the Van's facilities. The IDEAS Van will spend one day serving as an “annexe” to the Aboriginal Medical Service providing treatment from specialist ophthalmologists and optometrists to manage diabetes and its ophthalmic complications. The IDEAS Van will enhance existing services with state of the art equipment, staff and clinic space as needed by local and visiting service providers. Local providers ensure continuity of care between visits. In 2014 there will be approximately 70 clinics conducted across Queensland.

Access to the IDEAS Van is by GP referral from the local Aboriginal Medical Service. Patients are pre-screened with the non-mydratic camera. Specially trained health workers manage the pre-screening process. Based on a grading report, an appointment is scheduled for further investigation or treatment by the Ophthalmologist and/or Optometrist. Up to 21 patients are seen in one day in one of the three treatment rooms of the IDEAS Van. The host Aboriginal Medical Service takes full responsibility for clinic management and transport of patients.

A robust partnership between the following partners will provide a wealth of expertise and resources – Queensland Eye Institute, Queensland Aboriginal & Islander Health Council, Diabetes Queensland, CheckUP, Princess Alexandra Hospital Diabetes and Endocrinology Dept., Royal Flying Doctor Service, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists, Optometrist Association Australia, UQ Centre for Online Health, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Kurtz Transport. These partners form the “Partnership Advisory Committee” which meets regularly to guide and monitor the implementation. The Initiative is managed by Diamond Jubilee Partnerships Ltd, IDEAS CEO and team.

Telehealth is an integral part of the IDEAS Initiative. Establishing clinical grade telehealth facilities in each of the Aboriginal Medical Services will enhance training opportunities for health workers and improve interactions between remote communities and specialists. Telehealth consultations for patients with diabetes will involve Endocrinologists at the Princess Alexandra Hospital and specialists from other facilities throughout the state. Telehealth capabilities will also be available within the IDEAS Van for remote consultation or immediate connection to a Queensland Health hospital with telehealth facilities. Nine remote sites without the regular services of an Endocrinologist will benefit from this service.

The project will build the capacity of Aboriginal Medical Services to deliver enhanced diabetes care through up-skilling Aboriginal Health Workers in their knowledge of diabetes and diabetes eye disease. Each Aboriginal Medical Service will be provided with a non-mydriatic camera to facilitate a comprehensive pre-screening program to identify at risk clients. Patients will be managed through appropriate referral pathways to receive treatment on the purpose built, fully equipped, and specially designed ophthalmic trailer (IDEAS Van).

A screening program will ensure that all Indigenous diabetes patients have an annual retinal scan and those over 40 years of age will be screened as part of their annual health check. Fifty-one communities will benefit from this comprehensive program.

Inside the IDEAS Van

