



Media Statement

Saturday, March 19, 2016

New mobile eye service promises to save the sight of thousands.

A mobile eye health van fitted with state-of-the-art equipment will travel throughout Western Australia delivering vital services to regional, remote and Indigenous communities, reducing rates of preventable blindness and vision loss.

The Lions Outback Vision Van (LOVV) is being launched in Perth today by WA Deputy Premier Liza Harvey and Federal Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care Ken Wyatt MP and will start delivering services in Kalgoorlie from Monday.

The launch is from 10.30am at the Lions Eye Institute, 2 Verdun St, Nedlands.

The LOVV represents a \$5.1 million investment by the State Government, Lotterywest and the Lions Eye Institute (LEI) into eye health services in the State. The van received a further \$565,000 in funding from the Australian Government for specialist equipment.

McCusker Director of Lions Outback Vision Dr Angus Turner said the mobile eye service was a game-changer for regional and remote Western Australia.

“This service will help bridge the gap in connecting regional and remote Western Australians to eye health services,” he said. “In remote WA, eye specialist coverage is currently up to 19 times lower than in urban areas and rural residents are three times less likely to see an ophthalmologist.

“People in regional and remote Western Australia, therefore, are far more likely to be afflicted by preventable blindness and vision loss.”

The LOVV is fitted with state-of-the-art ophthalmic equipment and will travel 24,000km each year offering services in Albany, Esperance, Kalgoorlie, Leonora, Wiluna, Newman, Roebourne, Karratha, Port Hedland, Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Kununurra and Katanning.

Staffed by eye health specialists, it has the capacity to treat 200 patients per week for a range of eye conditions including cataracts, refractive error, trachoma, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.

Dr Turner thanked the LOVV’s partners – the WA State Government, Lotterywest, Commonwealth Government, LEI, the Newman Foundation, Device Technologies and Telstra – for their support.

LEI Managing Director Professor David Mackey said the ability to deliver specialist ophthalmology services into regional and remote WA would improve equity of access to health care across the State, help build local capacity in health services and raise awareness of eye health issues.

“In many instances it will be a practical and cost-effective alternative to transporting patients to Perth from the outback,” he said.

Lions Outback Vision is the outreach arm of the LEI and continues a long tradition of providing ophthalmic services in regional and remote Western Australia that began with the first mass glaucoma caravan screenings in the 1960s.

For more information about where the LOVV is scheduled to visit and when, visit <http://outbackvision.com.au/outback-vision-van/>

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Facts on vision loss and blindness in Australia

- People living in regional and remote Australia needlessly experience higher rates of blinding eye disease as 94 per cent of vision loss is preventable or treatable
- More than 50,000 Australians are blind and almost 500,000 suffer from low vision
- The number of Australians living with blindness and low vision is predicted to double by 2024
- The total cost of vision disorders in Australia is \$9.85 billion per year
- The rate of blindness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is 6.2 times higher than non-Indigenous Australians
- Indigenous Australians are 14 times more likely to have diabetes-related blindness and five times more likely to have refractive error blindness
- 35 per cent of Indigenous adults have never had an eye examination
- To overcome rural and remote disadvantage, 4800 patients are currently transferred to urban centres via the Patient Assistance Transport Scheme but the effectiveness of this approach is limited because many rural and remote Indigenous patients are unwilling to move “off country”