

Media Statement

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City or country, Lions Outback Vision is boosting patient attendance and closing the eye health gap

Lions Outback Vision (LOV) is closing the eye health gap for Indigenous patients in both metropolitan and country Western Australia.

In regional and remote areas, the Lions Outback Vision Van (LOVV) is increasing patient attendance rates and reducing the need for patients to travel to Perth for treatment.

A new study by Joshua Jeyaraj, Dr Josephine Muir and McCusker Director, Lions Outback Vision, Dr Angus Turner, examined two LOVV road trips to Derby during 2016 and compared data with two outreach ophthalmology clinics in 2015.

The study found previous ophthalmology outreach clinics had limited equipment, which meant more patients had to travel to major regional centres or Perth for treatment.

Dr Turner said the LOVV had resulted in greater patient satisfaction and attendance rates had increased from 50 per cent in 2015 to almost 68 per cent in 2016.

Launched in March 2016, the LOVV is a 20-metre van fitted with state-of-the-art ophthalmic equipment and staffed by skilled professionals. It travels all over the

State providing ophthalmological services usually only available in Perth or major regional centres.

“The Vision Van allows remote patients to access the gold standard of care,” Dr Turner said.

“This means more patients can receive higher quality diagnostic testing and therefore potential treatment without the need for regular travel, which is not only disruptive but also costly.

“I want to thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community for contributing to this study and giving us an insight into the performance of the Vision Van service.”

In Perth, LOV is also making an impact on patient attendance rates.

LOV runs urban clinics at Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service and Bentley Health Service once a month offering surgery, laser, injections and follow-up treatment to predominantly Aboriginal patients.

In 2016, around 50 per cent of booked patients attended their surgeries, but that has increased to 100 per cent this year.

The strategy used by the LOV team has been to build a relationship with patients prior to surgery by:

- Providing regular eye clinics at the local Aboriginal Medical Service
- Engaging a dedicated Aboriginal Health Worker
- Discussing options for treatment in a manner that is understandable by the patient
- Home visits to complete pre-admission paperwork
- A detailed appointment letter sent to patient
- Organising ‘Closing The Gap’ scripts for post-surgery eye drops
- Arranging transport for patient, either with cab vouchers provided by the Aboriginal Medical Service, or other organisation support

- Meeting the patient at the hospital and attend surgery with them
- Providing follow-up support post-surgery

Patient Sandra Wilkes, who required surgery for cataracts, said LOV staff members were supportive, compassionate and caring.

“I’m glad I got it done,” she said.

“It was especially good with the Aboriginal coordinator, Kerry Woods. Without her I wouldn’t of bothered to get the surgery or attend appointments.”

Dr Turner said LOV had worked hard to ensure attending hospital was a less intimidating experience.

“Eye surgery is scary so providing the patient with a positive experience reduces anxiety and improves the attendance rate,” he said.

“It is very pleasing to see Lions Outback Vision and the Vision Van breaking down barriers to eye health care for Indigenous patients.”

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Image: State-of-the-art technology on the LOV Van allows country patients’ access to high quality care closer to home