



## **Media Statement**

Wednesday, August 26, 2015

### **New mobile eye health clinic to provide services throughout WA from 2016.**

The Lions Eye Institute (LEI) today thanked the State Government and Lotterywest for supporting a new mobile eye healthcare service that will help save the sight of thousands of Western Australians living in regional and remote locations.

Health Minister Dr Kim Hames has committed \$2 million (\$400,000 over five years) to support equipment, fit out and running costs of a new Lions Outback Vision Van.

Lotterywest has also confirmed funding of \$1.9 million to support the innovative project while the Board of the LEI has committed \$240,000 per year over five years.

The Lions Outback Vision Van will have the capacity to treat 200 patients per week, providing comprehensive optometry and ophthalmology care for cataracts, refractive error, trachoma, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.

The van will travel more than 24,000km a year on sealed roads throughout the State, offering services in Albany, Esperance, Kalgoorlie, Leonora, Wiluna, Newman, Roebourne, Karratha, Port Hedland, Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Kununurra, Katanning and Carnarvon.

McCusker Director, Lions Outback Vision, Associate Professor Angus Turner, said the "Vision Van" project could not have gone ahead without Government and Lotterywest support.

"Developing a mobile eye clinic with the capacity to diagnose and treat more complex cases is not a cheap or straightforward exercise," he said.

“The benefits, however, are enormous. Once the Vision Van is up and running early next year, it will prove to be a highly cost-effective way of providing access to critical eye healthcare. It will also support one of LOV’s major goals to bridge the gap between rates of vision loss and blindness in Indigenous people compared to the broader Australian community.”

The van is currently being fitted out and will consist of a prime mover and semi-trailer, with the trailer containing three consulting rooms containing specialist equipment.

LEI Managing Director Professor David Mackey said the ability to deliver specialist ophthalmology services into regional and remote WA would save the sight of many people.

“It will improve equity of access to health care across the State, help build local capacity in health services and raise awareness,” Professor Mackey said.

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

Professor Mackey said the project reflected a historical commitment to the eye health of all people by the pioneers of Western Australia’s “save sight” movement.

“In 1964, the Australian Foundation for the Prevention of Blindness, and later the Lions Save-Sight Foundation, ran glaucoma screenings out of a customised mobile caravan that travelled all over the State and resulted in a mass screening program of 300,000 people,” he said.

“Fifty years later, the Lions Outback Vision Van continues that tradition by working to ensure that people have access to high-quality eye healthcare, regardless of where they live or economic circumstances.”

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