



## **Media Statement**

Monday, April 13, 2015

### **New leadership role focuses on high rates of preventable blindness among Indigenous people.**

The Lions Eye Institute (LEI) has announced the creation of a new professorial position at The University of Western Australia (UWA) which will focus on reducing high rates of preventable blindness and vision loss in the Indigenous population.

The *McCusker Director, Lions Outback Vision* role is being funded by a donation provided by the McCusker Charitable Foundation, through a grant from Telethon and UWA.

The grant recognises the outstanding work already being done by Dr Angus Turner and the Lions Outback Vision (LOV) team whose mission is to eliminate preventable blindness and vision loss in people living in regional and remote Western Australia.

The LOV has grown rapidly in its short life - offering 5969 patient consults in 2014 compared to 3235 the year before.

LEI Managing Director Professor David Mackey said the new position would help address a persistent gap between the eye health of Indigenous people and the general population.

Compared to the broader Australian community, Indigenous people are:

- Six times more likely to be blind

- 14 more times likely to have diabetes-related blindness, and
- Five times more likely to have refractive error.

However, 94 per cent of the vision loss is preventable or treatable.

“One of the challenges in addressing the gap is connecting rural and remote Australians to critical eye health services,” Professor Mackey said. “People living in remote and regional Australia have significantly less access to eye care services, with eye specialist coverage up to 19 times lower than in urban Australia.

“We thank Malcolm, Carolyn and Tonya McCusker from the McCusker Charitable Foundation, Telethon and UWA for recognising Indigenous eye health is a unique public health challenge in Australia and requires a specialised focus.”

The successful applicant will oversee the delivery of eye health care services in rural and remote WA, be responsible for managing and leading all operational and clinical aspects of specialist visits, optometry outreach and diabetic retinal screening programs.

A key part of the role includes advocacy and collaboration with State and Commonwealth agencies, stakeholders and partners to promote improved access to eye health services.

The role also includes oversight and provision of academic, teaching, research, clinical and funding / grant activities.

Applications close on April 30.

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***Photos of Dr Turner available on request***