



Media Statement

June 26, 2018

Australia's first Indigenous ophthalmologist makes history and paves the way for others to follow

Kristopher Rallah-Baker becomes Australia's first Indigenous ophthalmologist with the formal completion of his training today (June 26).

The Queensland doctor has been based with Lions Outback Vision - the outreach arm of the Lions Eye Institute in Western Australia - since the beginning of 2018.

Dr Rallah-Baker said his patients were excited to see an Indigenous face on the other side of a slit lamp during eye examinations.

"It brings them great pride and joy to know that Indigenous peoples are achieving across all fields and expressing the opinions and cultural perspectives from within organisations to help improve lives," he said.

"Being the first Indigenous ophthalmologist in Australia is of enormous importance, both symbolically and practically, because it breaks barriers that were once seen as impossible.

"I already mentor a number of junior Indigenous colleagues interested in ophthalmology and would ultimately like to see us reach population parity with non-Indigenous ophthalmologists."

Since arriving in Western Australia, the Fred Hollows Fellow has been working with the Lions Outback Vision team, led by McCusker Director Associate Professor Angus Turner.

Dr Rallah-Baker has spent most of his time working in outreach ophthalmology on the Vision Van - a mobile eye health clinic which travels all over the State delivering care for people with a range of eye conditions, including cataract, glaucoma, trachoma and diabetic retinopathy.

Associate Professor Turner said it was exciting to see Dr Rallah-Baker successfully complete the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmology's Vocational Training Program.

"Kris is already making a big impact on the profession as a leader and advocate," he said. "With Indigenous Australians three times more likely to be blind than the general Australian population, Kris' voice will help focus attention on this significant public health issue."

Dr Rallah-Baker believes partnerships will ultimately close the eye health gap in Australia.

"The Lions Outback Vision model is an exceptional example of the correct way to deliver appropriate, culturally safe services to rural and remote communities and there are many wonderful non-Indigenous doctors providing outstanding services to Indigenous peoples and communities - Angus Turner being a leader in ophthalmology," he said.

"Ultimately, Indigenous health is about a partnership and working together between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Each party brings a different perspective to health care and solving the complexities of Indigenous health."

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Image: Dr Kristopher Rallah-Baker, Australia's first indigenous ophthalmologist