

MEDIA STATEMENT

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New Eye Hub a Game-changer in Health Services Delivery in Australia's North West

The Lions Outback Vision Kimberley Eye Hub in Broome was officially opened today, in a ceremony that celebrated the immense progress being made in treating eye disease in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions.

The Hub, which was opened by Senator Patrick Dodson and Ms Divina D'Anna MLA, is providing greater equity of eye health services and transforming patient care in the remote, regional and vulnerable Aboriginal communities across the North West.

The Hub opened its doors in April 2021, and today's launch marked the completion of the second phase of building works at the site, which was formerly the Kimberley Klub backpacker hostel. It was donated to Lions Outback Vision by the Wen Giving Foundation and Hawaiian Group and has since undergone a significant transformation, while retaining the distinctive façade of the hostel.

The Hub provides permanent specialised eye health services in Broome and outreach to 20 communities and five regional towns across the Kimberley. It includes a full-service eye clinic with state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment, education and training spaces, a café and facilities for multi-disciplinary use by visiting specialists. There are three resident Lions Outback Vision doctors, two resident optometrists and a number of other staff.

The McCusker Director of Lions Outback Vision, Associate Professor Angus Turner, said the Hub model bridges geographical barriers. "The Hub enables us to treat patients closer to home, and this accessibility is crucial in dealing with the challenges of remote eye health. People in isolated places like the North West have more blindness and complications from eye disease than in other places," Associate Professor Turner said.

"In particular, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have more than three times the rates of blindness and 14 times the rates of vision loss from diabetes." Approximately 11 per cent of the North West Aboriginal population are vision impaired or blind, and 35 per cent of this population have never had an eye exam.

Professor Nitin Verma AM, President of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO) described the service as an exemplar of what can be achieved with vision, pragmatism and collaboration. "I had the pleasure of visiting Angus in May last year. It is amazing to see the progress he has made in such a short amount of time. The service brings the concept of equity of access to life – creating a hub for a population dispersed over our vast and sunburnt country," Professor Verma said.

“Is it a model for others to follow and a blueprint for RANZCO as we bring *Vision 2030 and beyond* to fruition. Angus’ commitment to equity is commendable and it is a commitment shared by so many ophthalmologists across Australia and New Zealand. It is the collective vision of the College, and we are proud to support Angus and his team on their endeavours.”

Associate Professor Turner said the development of the Hub had enabled the Lions Outback Vision team to put resources into prevention and education activities in communities. He said the next goal was to develop a day surgery in Broome, which would alleviate pressure on the Broome Hospital and enable more timely surgical and treatment interventions.

In addition to the Wen Giving Foundation and Hawaiian Group, the Hub has been supported by the Western Australian and Australian Governments, Kerry Stokes and Christine Simpson Stokes, McCusker Charitable Foundation, Channel 7 Telethon Trust, Fred Hollows Foundation, Rural Health West and industry partners including Zeiss, Alcon and Topcon.

About Lions Outback Vision

Lions Outback Vision, a fully owned subsidiary of the Lions Eye Institute, was established by Associate Professor Angus Turner in 2010. The Lions Outback Vision team works throughout the Pilbara, Kimberley, Goldfields, Midwest and Great Southern regions to provide optometry services, ophthalmology clinics, eye surgery, telehealth, Aboriginal patient support and diabetic retinopathy screening and education. Further, metropolitan clinics are held at Derbarl Yerrigan in East Perth. A Vision Van, introduced in 2016, enables the Lions Outback Vision team to travel throughout Western Australia.

In 2021, the Lions Outback Vision team treated more than 13,800 patients, including 3,000+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients. The total number of treatments included 1,400 telehealth consultations and more than 900 eye surgeries.

About the Lions Eye Institute

The Lions Eye Institute is both a highly respected research institute and a world-class ophthalmic clinic. The organisation’s core purpose is to prevent and cure blindness and eye disease, and it achieves this through the translation of science into practical outcomes that save people’s sight. A not-for-profit Western Australian organisation, the Lions Eye Institute has clinics in Nedlands, Murdoch, Midland and Broome. The Institute also includes a Clinical Trials Centre, Eye Bank, optometry practice and research laboratories.

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For media enquiries:

Tania Hudson, Lions Eye Institute, tania.hudson@lei.org.au or 0402 286 887