

## Understanding eye care through the experiences of Aboriginal people in the NT

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Preventable eye diseases cause 94% of vision loss in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (herein Aboriginal) adults (Taylor et al, 2012). Despite this, blindness rates in Aboriginal adults continue to sit at 6 times the rate of the mainstream population (Taylor et al, 2012). Recent studies have identified structural and systemic factors that inhibit access to eye care for Aboriginal people. However there is little evidence of the phenomenological factors that affect Aboriginal people's access to eye care, and the influence this has on decisions around eye health and care.

This study investigates why some Aboriginal people complete or do not complete their clinical eye care pathways, and why some do not access eye care at all. With a focus on cataract and diabetes eye diseases, we present the barriers and enablers around prevention practices, and primary, secondary and tertiary pathways of care, that have been identified through the perspectives of Aboriginal people in 2 remote Top End communities in the Northern Territory.

Three of the authors are Aboriginal community based researchers, who played an integral role in the conduct of interviews, and the thematic analysis of data. Engaging community researchers facilitated cultural and contextual appropriateness, knowledge exchange and capacity building. This presentation outlines (a) the research process (b) barriers and enablers to eye care through the voices of Aboriginal patients and (c) community driven recommendations to strengthen eye care systems in rural and remote communities.

Using a qualitative, Participatory Action Research (PAR) design, and in collaboration with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS), we aim to privilege the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people, through understanding how human experiences and the social determinants that shape them, impact equity in eye health.