Analysis of roles and training needs for regional eye health coordinators

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Aims: To define the key roles and training requirements for regional eye health coordinators (REHCs) and eye health workers (EHWs), and outline the process of recommending an ‘eye care skills set’ for national adoption and endorsement by the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (CSHISC).

Methods: A questionnaire was administered to all REHCs and associated personnel involved in eye care services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) communities across Australia. The survey determined REHCs’ typical job tasks, frequency of each task, priorities for training for new recruits to REHC positions.

Results guided the development of suitable competency units for a national REHC training package. This development process was undertaken collaboratively with a RTO for Aboriginal health workers (AHWs), and CSHISC.

Relevance: Despite widespread acknowledgment of the pivotal role of REHCs in delivery of effective and appropriate eye care for Indigenous communities, appropriate training has never been nationally endorsed for this cadre.

Hence, this represents vital work, by defining the core practice skills and establishing under the revised 2012 Health Training Package the eye care skill set for REHCs.

Findings have direct and tangible outcomes for REHCs, and therefore potential to contribute to improved vision care outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Results: There were 35 respondents (17 REHC, 18 AHWs). The top roles, under three categories, rated by two-thirds of respondents as being very important for a new recruit to be trained in were:

- eye care knowledge/skills:
  - taking retinal photos (76%)
  - taking spectacle measurements and helping patients choose frames (69%)
  - interpreting retinal photos, measuring visual acuity and developing educational material (65%)

- organisational tasks:
  - referring patients with diabetes for a dilated fundus exam, organising diabetes screening and maintaining patient lists (79%)
- scheduling dates for the visiting optometrist (69%)

- patient education:
  - explaining eye conditions (71%)
  - lifestyle and eye and explaining surgical procedures (65%)

By applying the detailed findings, an ‘eye care skills set’ was developed, with accredited units reviewed and improvements suggested to ensure the skills set package best aligns with the training needs of REHCs.

**Conclusions:** By understanding in detail the job tasks and training needs of current REHCs, an ‘eye care skills set’ training package has been recommended for national endorsement. Uptake of such training is likely to ensure a standard level of competency and confidence among REHCs, thereby contributing to improved job satisfaction, retention, and ultimately better capacity for regional eye care coordination.