MEDIA RELEASE

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Indigenous Eye Health Colloquium

Eye health and vision are precious to all of us, but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have significantly higher rates of vision impairment than other Australians. Half of that impairment is due to uncorrected refractive error, which can be corrected with suitable glasses. In rural and remote parts of Australia, Regional Eye Health Coordinators play a pivotal role in making sure that Australia’s first people have access to optometrists, ophthalmologists and eye health services.

A colloquium on Indigenous Eye Health at the 12th National Rural Health Conference in April will showcase Regional Eye Health Coordinators.

Pauline Wicks and Daniel Cook are Regional Eye Health Coordinators in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in NSW. They will open the colloquium, speaking about the success of the program and identifying the key factors contributing to that success.

As people age, eye sight can deteriorate to the point where it interferes with daily living. Robyn Main will talk about delivering optometry services to Indigenous aged care facilities in the Kimberley. She will tell a good news story about coordination and collaboration between optometry, ophthalmology and eye health services and the difference it can make to the quality of life for an older person.

Despite the pivotal role of Eye Health Coordinators in delivering eye care for Indigenous communities, appropriate training has never been nationally endorsed for these workers. Salma Ismail analysed their training needs and developed competency units for a national Regional Eye Health Coordinator training package. She will outline the process of recommending an ‘eye care skills set’ for national adoption and endorsement by the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council.

Being given an appropriate pair of glasses to correct your vision can be magic. However, the high rates of uncorrected refractive error experienced by Aboriginal people suggest that existing subsidised spectacle schemes are not meeting the need. Anna Morse will explore whether a national spectacle scheme would be effective.

Maree O’Hara will wrap up the colloquium by telling of the success of an Eye Health Program in a remote region of the Northern Territory. The colloquium will be chaired by Phil Anderton, an optometrist in Manilla, NSW.

More information on the Conference can be found at www.ruralhealth.org.au

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For information on rural and remote health in Australia, visit www.ruralhealth.org.au