Remote Indigenous aged care facilities of the Kimberleys—an eye health audit

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Aim: An outreach circuit of Indigenous aged care facilities (ACFs) was conducted in July 2012 providing optometry services to those unable to attend regular clinics. Examining the eye health of the residents and therefore establishing if their eye sight was adequate for their needs, or if not, referral pathways to local services were investigated.

Method: Liaising with the ACF staff, visiting ophthalmologists and local optometrists to organise the circuit was imperative and included emails and phone calls from six months before the visit took place. Administrative requirements included lists of residents at each ACF, their personal details including medical records and Medicare names and numbers were required. Equipment suited to mobile optometry was required. Residents were examined in a consultation room at each ACF on the designated day. Results were recorded in a computerised record system. Referral to visiting ophthalmologists was implemented when necessary.

Relevance: Service provision to remote areas is a recognised issue that needs to be highlighted if the health gap is to be closed. ACFs are the ‘final chapter’ for health care and, therefore, the gaps endured in earlier years can be revealed more clearly. In eye health, optimum care results in good vision and therefore improved quality of life, especially in the latter years of a person’s life. An audit of eye health indicates the wellbeing in this important area-eye sight.

Results: Six ACFs were visited over eleven days. A total of 109 residents were examined. Of these, 107 were Indigenous people ranging from 63–101 years of age. The majority had good eye health, with nine requiring referral for ophthalmological examination, mainly cataract extraction.

Conclusion: The low incidence of ophthalmological referral required and the excellent findings of good vision and eye health in the ACF populations of the Kimberleys is a ‘good news story’ that should be celebrated by all who have worked so hard in the past to enable these legends to enjoy seeing the sunsets of their final years.