

Our people, our places and unpredictability

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We are a community-controlled eye health service. This means that the community and especially our Board at our Aboriginal Medical Service has a say in the way they would like our service to be.

This is very exciting as our community are our patients and we are not short of feedback. This means that people get the service they want, not the one others, who don't live here, think they should have.

The 8 year journey of this particular model of delivery, has been one of discovery and adjustments.

A lot of assumptions were made by me (the Eye Coordinator) that were wrong, partially right and nearly right!

I have learnt that the model we have needs to be reliable but fluid. That sounds impossible but somehow that works.

Our clinicians (the optometrists and the Eye Specialist) are very gracious about usually working so hard I feel we are in a horse race sometimes, galloping towards the end.

This means that we never say "no" to anyone that wants to see an optometrist. Sounds easier than done because then we have to triple book for the one appointment sometimes. Somehow with the non attendees and patients that are very good about waiting (because they understand the crazy system and why we have it) it all works.

Our community members have taught me a lot about their lifestyles and what challenges there are for many of them.

This has changed my delivery of the service. It was always done with the right intent but with understanding it is even better.

Some of the wrong assumptions I made for the majority—people get sick of appointment letters (they don't), they get sick of you keep asking them to come in (they don't), people would not speak up if they wanted something else (they do) and many other assumptions.

I also learnt that it was best to have an assistant and driver that were Aboriginal but if I didn't—people understood and we all worked it out. Lucky for us now we have both.

Most of our clients are from traditional Aboriginal backgrounds and continue to keep me (often via the Eye Health Assistant and driver, or directly) attuned to their needs

This is just part of my ongoing journey but I hope it continues with such unpredictability!