

TACKLING TRACHOMA ON WORLD SIGHT DAY



PHOTO: ASPEN MEDICAL

Australia is the only developed country in the world today where trachoma still exists.

This disease, the number one preventable cause of blindness, remains rife in some of the nation's remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

While rates of the infectious disease have decreased more than 10 per cent in the past six years, more work needs to be done to close the vision health gap for the nation's Indigenous communities.

As part of World Sight Day on 8 October 2015, the Remote Area Health Corps (RAHC) and the Aspen Foundation, the charitable foundation of RAHC's parent company Aspen Medical, championed and continued to work towards the World Health Organisation's goal of eliminating trachoma in Australia by 2020.

For the past six years, the Aspen Foundation has joined forces with the University of Melbourne's Indigenous Eye Health Unit (IEHU), spearheaded by Professor Hugh Taylor, and with the Christian Blind Mission.

Through this partnership, the Aspen Foundation has supported the development of the Trachoma Story Kit, which is now being used to raise awareness of trachoma prevention and treatment in remote Indigenous communities.

The Kit features culturally-specific and engaging health education that health professionals, including Aboriginal Health Workers, community elders and teachers can use in clinics, schools and communities.

RAHC has been providing health professionals to assist health services deliver essential primary healthcare to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Northern Territory since 2008.

The RAHC team and the hundreds of health professionals RAHC has deployed, all passionate about improving Indigenous health, are familiar with the debilitating impact of trachoma on remote communities.

RAHC launched an eLearning module on trachoma last year as part of a suite of 15 free online modules, which are available to all health professionals wanting to learn more about Indigenous health. There are also modules on diabetic retinopathy, also developed



with IEHU, and on eye health care in the primary healthcare setting developed with the Brien Holden Vision Institute with support from the Fred Hollows Foundation.

Hundreds of health professionals have already tapped into the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) point-recognised modules. This year the CPD modules were awarded the Northern Territory's iAward in the Health Services category for outstanding ICT innovation.

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