

Eye screening and care

navigating the treatment pathway



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people begin life with generally very good vision—on average better than non-Indigenous people—but in adulthood, rates of blindness increase at an earlier age than for non-Indigenous people.



Complications from some health conditions (e.g. diabetes) can result in severe vision loss and blindness that can be prevented if people receive regular eye checks, relevant eye screening and care.



It's important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and adults are supported to get regular eye checks and navigate the treatment pathway.

Eye screening and care: what's it all about?

Eye screening is a quick way to detect eye problems and can be conducted by a range of trained primary health care (PHC) professionals, including: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners, eye health workers (EHWs), regional eye health coordinators (REHCs), nurses and general practitioners (GPs).



Other PHC professionals can also play an important role in encouraging patients to get eye checks, including: health promotion officers, diabetes educators, and chronic disease care coordinators.



When eye checks indicate that patients have reduced vision, diabetes and/or complex eye conditions, PHC professionals refer them to an optometrist or an eye specialist (ophthalmologist) if a more comprehensive eye exam and treatment may be needed. Optometrists can correct vision problems with glasses or contact lenses, while specialist eye doctors (ophthalmologists) can also treat eye diseases with medication and/or surgery.



Eye care often involves different health professionals, seen at different times, in different locations. However, in remote areas and within some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Services, PHC professionals and visiting optometry and/or ophthalmology teams work together to provide eye care in the health centre, or in a mobile vision van (a specialist treatment centre on wheels).



Meet the eye health professionals!

Eye health workers (EHWs): are health workers (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners) who have had some eye care training. They work with regional eye health coordinators, perform eye checks and some eye care, and make referrals if further eye assessment is needed. Not all regions of Australia have EHWs.

Optometrists: can screen for eye disease and vision disorders, prescribe glasses or contact lenses to correct vision and refer to an ophthalmologist if needed. Please note that optometrists are not medical doctors.

Regional eye health coordinators (REHCs): have different roles in different parts of Australia, but they focus on coordinating eye care services across their region to increase access to improved eye care. Some also have clinical roles associated with eye checks and care. Not all regions of Australia have REHCs.

Ophthalmologists (eye doctors): are medical doctors who specialise in eye care. They can screen and diagnose and treat eye problems, prescribe medications and perform surgery.



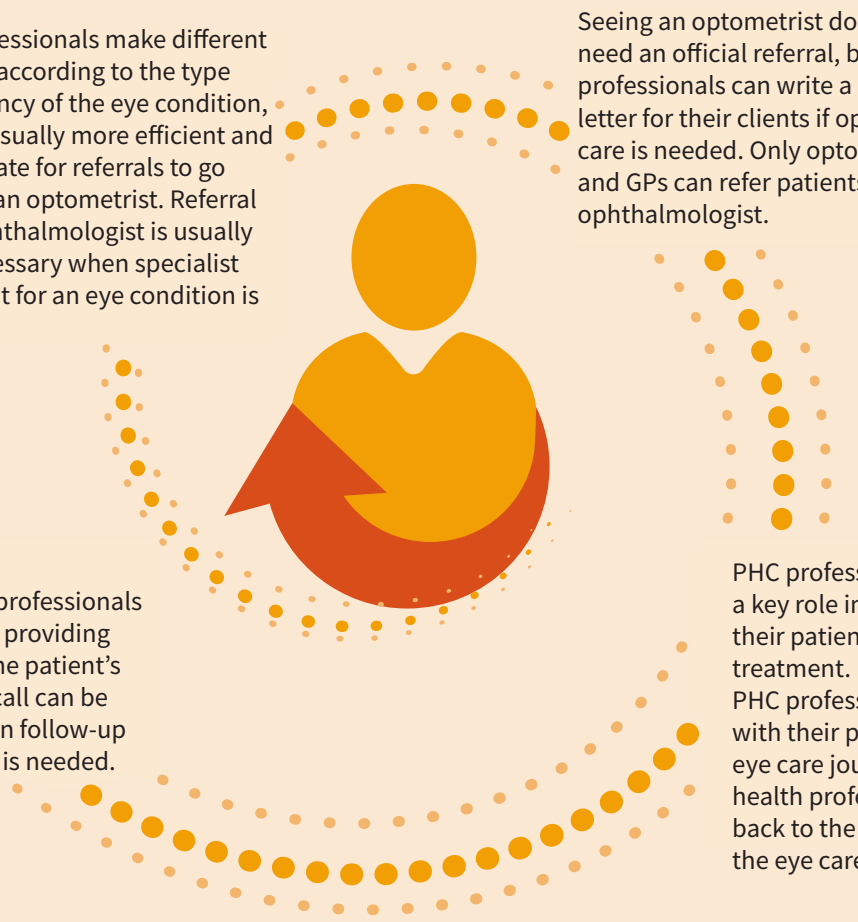
Making referrals for further eye assessment and care

PHC professionals make different referrals according to the type and urgency of the eye condition, but it is usually more efficient and appropriate for referrals to go through an optometrist. Referral to an ophthalmologist is usually only necessary when specialist treatment for an eye condition is needed.

Seeing an optometrist doesn't need an official referral, but PHC professionals can write a referral letter for their clients if optometric care is needed. Only optometrists and GPs can refer patients to an ophthalmologist.

After treatment by an ophthalmologist, PHC professionals should receive a report providing a complete history of the patient's eye care. This way a recall can be sent to the patient when follow-up eye screening and care is needed.

PHC professionals can play a key role in supporting their patients to complete treatment. It is important that PHC professionals follow-up with their patients along the eye care journey, and that eye health professionals report back to the health centre about the eye care provided.



What eye screening is done during an eye check?



Eye checks are an important part of broader preventive health efforts like:

- health assessments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- chronic disease management.

When conducting eye checks, PHC professionals conduct different types of eye screening. Eye checks usually include:

- taking the patient's case history
- screening for visual acuity (measuring refractive error i.e. distance/near vision)
- checking the structure of the eyes for abnormalities.



Depending on the patient's age and needs, and the training and resources available to the PHC professional, eye checks may also include:

- screening for infant red reflex
- screening for cataract
- screening for diabetic retinopathy (DR) if patients have diabetes
- screening for trachoma (in children) and trichiasis (in adults) in parts of the country where active trachoma persists
- screening for trichiasis (in adults) if they grew up in a trachoma area but now live elsewhere
- treatment for minor eye injuries
- appropriate referral if further eye assessment and/or care is needed.



Helping patients along the treatment pathway



Early detection, prompt referral, and appropriate treatment can prevent or reduce the impact of many eye problems, but the treatment pathway can be confusing, especially when it involves different health professionals, seen at different times, in different locations—and it is common for patients to drop out along the way.

Linked and coordinated eye care services are needed to help patients complete the eye care journey from:



Sources

- Remote Area Health Corps, Brien Holden Vision Institute (n.d.) *Primary eye care checks* (eLearning module). Canberra: Remote Area Health Corps
- Brien Holden Vision Institute Academy (n.d.) *Eye and vision care toolkit*. Sydney: Brien Holden Vision Institute

More information

Online education

- [Diabetic retinopathy grading course](#) (Indigenous Eye Health and Centre for Eye Research Australia)
- eLearning modules (Remote Area Health Corps):
 - [Primary eye care checks](#)
 - [Eye health and diabetes](#)
 - [Trachoma](#)
- [Eye and vision care toolkit](#) (Brien Holden Vision)
- [Retinal camera training for primary health care workers](#) (Brien Holden Vision Institute)

Guidelines

- [Guidelines for the management of diabetic retinopathy](#) (National Health and Medical Research Council)
- [Trachoma: CDNA national guidelines for the public health management of trachoma](#) (Communicable Disease Network Australia)

Education and other resources

- [Check Today, See Tomorrow: resource package](#) (Indigenous Eye Health)
 - [MBS item 715/12325 eye check card](#)
- [Diabetic eye screening: education resource for Aboriginal Health Workers](#) (Lions Outback Vision)
- [Outback Vision diabetic retinopathy: video](#) (Lions Outback Vision)
- [Provision of Eye Health Equipment and Training: project information](#) (Brien Holden Vision Institute)

Manuals and guides

- [CARPA standard treatment manual: a clinic manual for primary health care practitioners in remote and Indigenous health services in central and northern Australia: eye assessment](#) (Central Australian Rural Practitioners Association)
- [Chronic conditions manual: prevention and management of chronic conditions in Australia: Child and adult health checks \(eyes and vision\)](#) (Rural and Remote Clinical Support Unit, Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service)
- [Clinical procedures manual for remote and rural practice: supporting clinical practice in the bush: checking near and distance vision](#) (CRANApplus)
- [National guide to a preventive health assessment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: eye health](#) (National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners)
 - [Visual acuity](#)
 - [Trachoma and trichiasis](#)

This factsheet has been developed by the Australian Indigenous Health/InfoNet and The Fred Hollows Foundation. This and other multimedia resources are available on the Health/InfoNet's Eye Health webpage: healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/eye-health.

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