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Welcome investment in Indigenous eye health

Vision 2020 Australia welcomes the Australian Government's investment to target major causes of vision loss in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Government's 2018-19 budget allocated \$34.3 million to the eye health issues that disproportionately impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Vision 2020 Australia CEO Carla Northam said "Our members consistently tell us that the three major causes of vision loss for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are eye problems associated with diabetic retinopathy, uncorrected refractive error and the length of time people wait for cataract surgery.

"With the right amount of funding, we can address these debilitating eye conditions."

Dr Dawn Casey, Acting CEO of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) welcomed the focus on providing eye health checks, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have diabetes. "We need to do all we can to make sure all Aboriginal people with diabetes have an annual eye test. At the moment, only around half are getting their eyes checked every year."

Professor Hugh Taylor from Indigenous Eye Health, the University of Melbourne identified access to cataract surgery as needing serious attention. He said "Vision loss from cataract is twice as common in Indigenous Australians and they have to wait almost twice as long for surgery."

Professor Taylor added "Eye care services at the local and regional levels must be planned and resourced to meet population-based needs."

While the details on how the Government will spend the \$34.3 million are unclear, Vision 2020 Australia believes that activity must focus on cutting cataract surgery wait times, making sure everyone with diabetes has an annual eye test and getting glasses to people who need them. Through these measures the Government will meet its commitment to address the major causes of vision loss in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

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For more information: Policy and Advocacy Team, Vision 2020 Australia

03 9656 2020 or cstockley@vision2020australia.org.au