IDEAS VAN (Indigenous Diabetes Eyes and Screening)

“DON’T BE BLINDED BY DIABETES”

In 2013, the IDEAS Initiative was launched to substantially reduce preventable blindness and vision loss amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with diabetes. As part of this initiative, the IDEAS Van—a state-of-the-art mobile eye care facility—was specially designed and built to travel around Queensland’s rural and remote communities, delivering high-quality eye care and preventing and treating diabetes-related vision loss and blindness.

Diabetes is the leading cause of preventable vision loss and blindness in Australia and it affects one in three Indigenous people over the age of 40. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this age group are 10 times more likely to develop diabetic retinopathy (a serious complication of diabetes that can cause blindness) and six times more likely to go blind than non-Indigenous Australians.

Vision loss represents 11 per cent of the Indigenous health gap, but 94 per cent of this vision loss can be prevented or treated if people have access to the care they need, when they need it. In many rural and remote communities, however, this care is only available at the nearest hospital with the necessary clinicians and equipment. This is often too far away to access easily, which means that people’s eye complications frequently go untreated, leading to vision loss and even blindness.
To address this challenge, the IDEAS Van travels around Queensland providing people with regular access, world-class eye care in the familiar cultural surrounds of their own communities at no cost. The IDEAS Van acts as an annexe to the Aboriginal Medical Service where it is parked for the clinic.

The IDEAS Van is the first of its kind. It has three treatment rooms—each equipped with the latest diagnostic tools and technology—and is staffed by a team of volunteer ophthalmologists and optometrists plus orthoptist/ophthalmic assistant. People at risk of vision loss and/or blindness are identified through the IDEAS Initiative’s screening program, which screens people for sight problems in 51 communities across rural and remote Queensland.

Images are sent to Professor Paul Mitchell of Westmead’s Millennium Institute who grades the images and prepares a report for the local GP. Those at risk of vision loss and/or blindness are then referred to the IDEAS Van by the GP at the Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) and transported to the van for their appointment when it arrives in their community for its scheduled visit. The AMS manages the follow-up visits for each patient.
Since March 2014, the IDEAS Van has travelled over 100,000 kms across Queensland, hosting 80 clinics in rural and remote sites. Over 3,000 patients have been screened for sight problems, and over 1,200 referred patients have received treatment on the IDEAS Van.

The IDEAS Initiative is implemented by Diamond Jubilee Partnerships Ltd, with support from its partners: Queensland Health, the Queensland Eye Institute, Diabetes Queensland, CheckUP, the Princess Alexandra Hospital Diabetes and Endocrinology Dept., the Royal Flying Doctor Service, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists, the Optometrist Association Australia, the UQ Centre for Online Health, Extensia, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Kurtz Transport, Volvo Trucks, Ellex, Device Technologies, JJ. Richards, Minter Ellison, BDO, Crowe Horwath, Traymark.

For further details about the IDEAS Van and the IDEAS Initiative, please visit:

http://www.ideasvan.org