Charleville woman, Kay Smith, is one of the patients to receive sight-saving cataract surgery.

An extensive team of ophthalmologists, nurses and medical staff converged on the Roma South West Hospital last weekend to deliver cataract surgery to sixty patients from surrounding regions.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients from 13 districts including Charleville, Dalby, St George and Cunnumulla will receive the sight-saving surgery over a three-day program.

The logistical feat is an initiative by not-for-profit health organisation, CheckUP, which aims to make specialist health services more accessible to patients in rural and remote areas.

“The stress of having to leave their homes, their families and other social and work circumstances to have to travel to somewhere like Toowoomba or Brisbane is actually a huge imposition and sometimes people just aren’t able to go,” says CheckUP CEO, Ann Marie Liddy.
CWAATSICH CEO Cheryl Lawton is optimistic about the benefits of the program.

Charleville and Western Areas Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Community Health (CWAATSICH) CEO, Cheryl Lawton, says that long travel distances are a barrier for Indigenous patients seeking health care services.

“We’ve actually fought for a long time to have these operations closer to home because a lot of our people won’t travel to Brisbane,” she says.

“By having this done it will enable them to manage their chronic illness a lot better, they’ll be able to see more clearly and enjoy more quality of life.”

Blindness and visual impairment are strongly linked to diabetes and other chronic health issues that affect Indigenous Australians.

While CWAATSICH continue to address Indigenous chronic illness through health and screening programs, surgeries like this ensure that patients in rural areas get the help they need.

With all sights set on the goal, it has been a medical endeavor that owes its success to the cooperation of many local organisations.

“It’s been a tremendous team effort from everyone involved... it has taken considerable planning and the cooperation and goodwill of many organisations from South-West Queensland and Brisbane”.
And in the words of patient Kay Smith, the efforts have paid off. “This is something for the outback people... this is something that they can reach.” Remaining patients will undergo surgery in March.