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VISION
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THE RIGHT TO SIGHT
AUSTRALIA

Eye Health Programs in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands

Submission

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Background

Eye health is a key public health issue in both PNG and the Solomon Islands, and eliminating avoidable blindness is of central importance to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and breaking the poverty cycle. Over 80,000 people in the Pacific are needlessly blind, and 240,000 have very poor vision. Approximately 70 per cent of vision impairment is caused by cataract, and other main causes include a lack of glasses, corneal disease, and trauma.

There are a number of barriers to the elimination of avoidable blindness in PNG and the Solomon Islands. These include:

- inadequate eye care infrastructure and services (small populations spread over large areas of land and ocean)
- very low numbers of ophthalmologists, optometrists, and nurses available to provide treatment
- severe under-resourcing of eye clinics and equipment
- lack of community health promotion
- a lack of effective cost recovery and cost sharing initiatives to help distribute the burden of funding between governments, donors, and patients.

What's being done?

Fortunately, due to the passionate work of individuals and organisations in both countries (including members of the global movement VISION 2020: The Right to Sight, and Vision 2020 Australia), much progress has been made in recent years. Below are some examples of world-leading programs, and key individuals, whom the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing may wish to visit, to enable better understanding of this important work.

Papua New Guinea

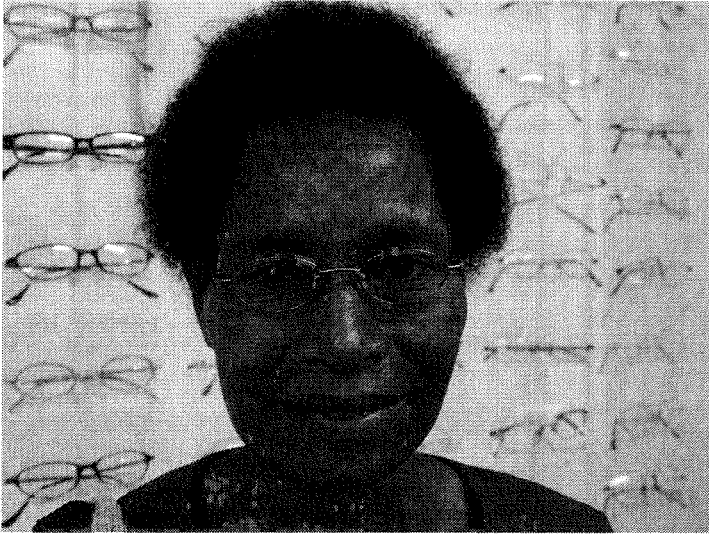
Port Moresby Vision Centre

Port Moresby Vision Centre (PMVC) was opened in October 2008. PMVC is located at Port Moresby General Hospital and provides quality eye care for patients seeking an affordable pair of glasses. The centre includes a clinic, spectacles workshop and dispensing area, which were established and equipped by the International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE). Since the opening of the PMVC, the number of spectacles dispensed and refractions conducted has steadily increased, showing an improved uptake of the services by the community. During the 2008-09 financial year, 1200 patients were seen for refractions and eye examinations, and 1350 pairs of glasses were dispensed.

This Vision Centre, and others which have been established around the world, are based on the Indian LV Prasad Eye Institute Vision Centre model, which has proved successful in making eye care services more accessible, and which is based on a sustainable cost sharing model.

The Hon Bob McMullan MP visited the PMVC following its launch in October 2008, noting that it was an important step in enhancing eye care in both urban and rural PNG, and that it constituted a great example of partnership between the local community, government and ICEE. Another Vision Centre in **Mount Hagen** commenced operations in July 2009, and one will soon be launched in **Lae**.

ICEE also assists with the recruitment and training of personnel, helping enhance the human resource capacity of PNG eye care now and into the future. The Manager of PNG Eye Care, **Judith Maino Kipo**, is dedicated to efforts to achieve gender equality in PNG eye health. In a recent interview, Judith noted that 'Because our services are affordable, women can get glasses and eye care when they wouldn't have been able to in the past. Importantly, we also provide a service where women and girls feel comfortable.'



Restoring Sight at the Port Moresby Vision Centre (courtesy of ICEE)



Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, the Honourable Bob McMullan, with a Refractionist at the Port Moresby Vision Centre (Courtesy of ICEE)

The Solomon Islands

There are approximately 500,000 people living in the Solomon Islands, around 20,000 experiencing blindness and low vision, primarily because of cataracts. At present, there are two eye doctors and 12 eye nurses in the Solomon Islands, well short of the number needed to effectively address blindness and vision impairment.

The International Centre for Eyecare Education and The Fred Hollows Foundation are both active in the Solomon Islands, providing surgical outreach services, scholarships to doctors and nurses, and appropriate equipment to trained staff. Ophthalmologists from Foresight Australia have also been active in performing surgery and building eye care capacity since 1993.

The Honiara Central Referral Hospital

The Honiara Central Referral Hospital (HCRH) is fast becoming the referral centre for the rest of the Pacific Islands, as it is the only centre in the Pacific that has an anaesthetist and facilities to conduct major surgery. The HCRH Eye Unit sees more than 10,000 outpatients annually, with a total surgical output of more than 450 per annum.

The HCRH surgical team also delivers secondary eye care services at 14 other sites in eight provinces, and annually more than 600 cataract surgeries are performed.

Dr Claude Posala and Dr Nola Pikacha are knowledgeable and enthusiastic young eye doctors and will be available to meet with the Parliamentary Delegation if requested. **Dr Tenneth Dalipanda**, Medical Superintendent of the NCRH, will also be available to meet with the Delegation if requested.

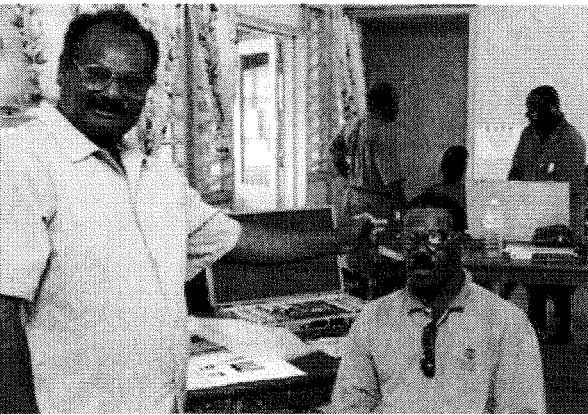
In addition, the World Health Organisation's Country Liaison Officer **Dr William Adu-Krow** is a passionate advocate for eye care in the Solomon Islands, and would be happy to provide an overview of eye care and recent policy developments in the Solomon Islands.

The Honiara Vision Centre

Like Vision Centres in Papua New Guinea, The Honiara Vision Centre is leading the way in the provision of low cost spectacles and helping break the relationship between vision impairment and poverty.



Solomons Eye Doctor, Nola Pikacha, with a patient before surgery (Courtesy of ICEE)



Building the capacity of eye care nurses through the Refractionist Training Course (Courtesy of The Fred Hollows Foundation)

