

# ABORIGINAL EYECARE

## NORTHERN NEWS

December 2007



### 2007 IN REVIEW

#### Welcome to the Northern News!

We are happy to inform you that the last 12 months have been a busy and exciting time for ICEE. We continue to expand much needed eye care services to the Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory.

In 2007 we serviced 34 Aboriginal communities, seeing 1,400 people and prescribing approximately 1,000 pairs of spectacles. A big thank you to our locum optometrists, Aboriginal health workers, community health centre staff, dispensing staff and Aboriginal Eye Health Coordinators. Without your help this would not have been possible.

We are now working in all five eye health regions in the Northern Territory. In early December we conducted our first eye clinic in Central Australia. Thank you to the Ampilatwatja Health Centre for inviting ICEE into your community.

The ability to provide Aboriginal people with glasses, has been enhanced by ICEE establishing a contract with Centrelink. Patients who currently receive centrelink payments can choose to have deductions taken from these payments to cover the cost of their spectacles.

The Aboriginal Vision Team at ICEE would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a safe, happy and enjoyable festive season – Merry Christmas! We look forward to working with you in 2008.

**Tricia Keys**  
ICEE Project Development Officer

### NATIONAL EYE HEALTH DEMONSTRATION GRANT

As the name suggests, ICEE has a key focus on providing education opportunities. Due to our history of close collaboration with the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council, and successful training programs in NSW, in August we were the recipient of a National Eye Health Demonstration Grant from the Commonwealth Government. This will be used to provide further training programs on eye health and vision care in the NT over the next 18 months. The program is split into two groups:

#### 1. Aboriginal Eye Health Workers (AEHW)

ICEE will continue to run annual, 5 day workshops for the Aboriginal Eye Health Workers / Coordinators - to assist them in coordinating and facilitating the eye health program in their region; and screening Aboriginal communities for eye conditions.

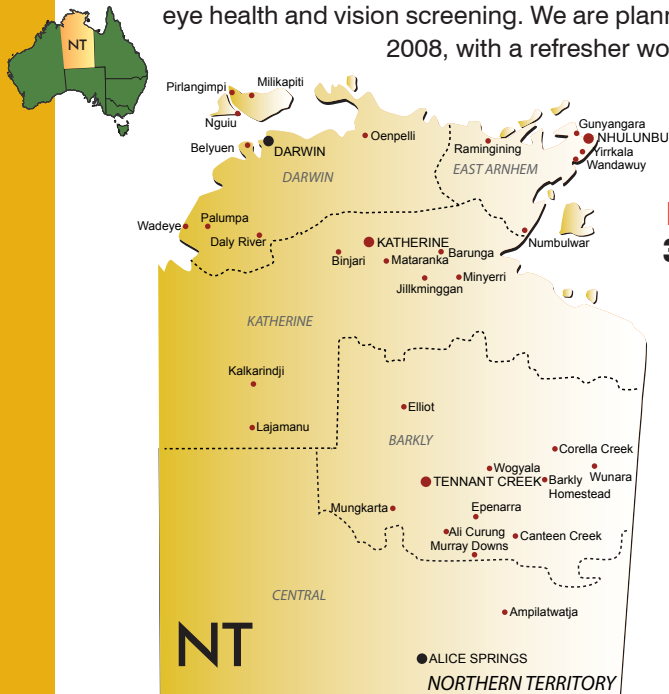
For the 2008 program, the five regional AEHWs will be invited to attend, and bring along a fellow representative from their organisation or region.

The first workshop for Aboriginal Eye Health Workers has been scheduled for 25th to 29th February, in Katherine. To those who are attending, we are sure you will find it very enjoyable and informative as we develop a new action-packed program for the week!

#### 2. Aboriginal Health Workers (AHW) from within the Darwin region:

Initially, we aim to train approximately 15 AHWs, with one AHW being invited to attend from each community in the greater Darwin Eye Health Region.

The course will be a 3 day workshop aimed at up-skilling the participants in eye health and vision screening. We are planning to run the course in May 2008, with a refresher workshop the following year.



**ICEE COMMUNITY VISITS:  
34 LOCATIONS IN 2007**





## INTERESTING FACT NIGHT VISION

It is true that eating carrots helps our night vision. Carrots are rich in Vitamin A, and Vitamin A is required to produce molecules of rhodopsin. Rhodopsin is found in the retinal cells called rods, is the pigment that allows night vision, and is extremely sensitive to light.

If we are exposed to white light (eg camera flash), the pigment is immediately bleached and can take 30 minutes to fully regenerate. As rhodopsin is insensitive to longer wavelengths of light (eg red light) many people use red light if they are trying to preserve their night vision.

Some animals such as cats and dogs, have evolved to have excellent night vision. In humans, only about 10% of the light that enters our eye falls on photosensitive parts of the retina (rods). Whereas animals have a structure in their eye that reflects light back towards the retina, thus, increasing the amount of light that reaches the photosensitive receptors. This is especially useful at night when lighting levels are low.



### A warm welcome to Elizabeth

We would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to the newest member of the ICEE Aboriginal Vision Team: Elizabeth Louwdyk. Elizabeth joined ICEE in October, as the Project Administrator for the Aboriginal Vision Program. Many of you will have already been in contact with Elizabeth, as she endeavours to organise optometrists, clinics, spectacle orders and help with your enquires.

-Dorothy Butler

### EYE HEALTH COORDINATOR PROFILE

# DOROTHY BUTLER

**Dorothy Butler has been working in Eye Health for over ten years. In her own words Dorothy describes her experience so far:**

My name is Dorothy Butler and I am an Indigenous Jawoyn woman from the Northern Territory. Born in Darwin but spent all my life in Katherine - give or take a few years getting my medical training down in the big smoke.

I worked at the Katherine District Hospital for 33 years as an enrolled nurse, covering all areas, including theatre, emergency department and general wards, but got the most enjoyment in paediatrics (children ward) where I spent my last 15 years.

In 2001 I became a registered Aboriginal Health Worker, as I felt that I needed to expand and broaden my knowledge to help my people. I started work with the Specialist Outreach Service, based in Darwin, in 1997 as a trainee eye health worker. This meant lots of travel from Katherine to all communities in the Top End.

I commenced work with Wurlu-Wurlinjang Aboriginal Medical Service in 2002 as the Eye Health Coordinator for the Katherine District. The Katherine District has 25 communities that I need to visit at least once per year. It depends on the wet season when we can travel to some areas as there are several large rivers we have to cross, and most of the unsealed roads are also impassable. Thus screening normally starts in mid May to early November. As most of the communities are so isolated the need for an eye team to visit the communities is very important.

The aim is to improve the eye health of indigenous people by providing eye health promotion, screening and early detection. By offering the service of the Ophthalmologist and Optometrist this will help to provide a better quality of life.

The diabetic screening team also plays a big role in providing life style education and support to all clients. The aim of the diabetic team is to take retinal photograph of all diabetic clients and report back to a nominated Ophthalmologist.

A three year program has been set up in training 2 Aboriginal Health Workers as Eye Health Coordinators. I think this program will go well, and hopefully I can resign in the future knowing that all the good work can be carried on. If I have helped to improve the quality of life for our people, then I have achieved my goals

I feel that all the support I have from my people and my work mates is what makes this job enjoyable and very rewarding.

I would also like to thank Tricia and Nina from ICEE for giving up their time in supporting my eye program.

## ICEE CONTACTS

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