

INTENSIVE EYE SURGERY WEEKS

Evaluation of the Intensive Eye Surgery Weeks

April 2019



Murti Wirinang, optometrist, Dean assists Saily after receiving cataract surgery during one of the Intensive Eye Surgery Weeks.

The Intensive Eye Surgery Weeks

The Fred Hollows Foundation (The Foundation) and partners have delivered Intensive Eye Surgery Weeks (Intensives) in Australia since 2007. This is in response to the high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the wait list for cataract surgery and the need to address cataract and difficulty in navigating treatment pathways.

Intensives are offered from year to year by surgical teams that visit for short periods and have been supported by The Foundation in various regions in the Northern Territory (Katherine, Darwin, Central Australia and Barkly), New South Wales (Western New South Wales) and Queensland (Cape York).

The Evaluation

The Foundation's Indigenous Australia Program undertook an evaluation on the Intensives delivered in the Katherine/Darwin regions of the Northern Territory from August to November 2018.

As part of the evaluation, in-depth interviews with patients and healthcare staff involved in the Intensives were conducted to understand the outcomes of the Intensives and identify opportunities to improve future Intensives and eye care delivery.

Other publications on the Intensives

This brief follows on from previous bulletins on the Intensives: [Development Effectiveness bulletin #34: Intensive Eye Surgery Weeks \(2016\)](#)

[The Indigenous Australia Program's case study: Intensive Eye Surgery Week. \(2016\)](#)



Evaluation aims

1. To understand the outcomes of the Intensives from the experience and perspectives of patients and service providers.
2. To identify lessons and areas for improvement in the delivery of cataract surgery and eye care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Discussion

The Intensives show that it is possible to address a backlog of cataract surgeries. Over four weekends, The Foundation and its partners were able to provide 48 cataract surgeries to patients living in the Katherine region. This is on par with the number of cataract surgeries delivered at the regional hospital in a year.

The Intensives enabled patients to access cataract surgery earlier than what is possible through the routine pathway for cataract care.

The aspects of care that were highly regarded as part of the Intensives include the end-to-end support provided to the patient throughout the entire cataract pathway. This includes transport and support from others in the form of Aboriginal Liaison Officers, staff and escorts. **There is a need to provide more culturally appropriate pathways to cataract surgery, such as those illustrated through the Intensives model.**

Delivering cataract surgery relies on well-functioning health information systems and good communication between primary and tertiary health services. The strong working relationships between organisations were key to the success of this project and critical to ensure that data and information could be shared and communicated in a timely and effective manner.

Evaluation results

The evaluation found:

Patient feedback	Ten of the 40 patients from the Intensives were interviewed. All patients rated the Intensives as a “very good experience”; 80% spoke very highly of their experience to family and friends.
Staff feedback	Eight healthcare staff from a mix of services and positions were surveyed. 87% of staff rated the Intensives experience as “very positive”.
Culturally responsive care	All patients said that staff were kind and caring; 90% rated the overall care received at the hospital as “very good”.
Health literacy	The timing of and way in which health information is communicated is important. There are opportunities to improve health literacy responsiveness within services involved in the Intensives and eye care in general.
Mutual support	Escorts, Aboriginal Liaison Officers and other patients helped to provide mutual support and encouragement to get cataract surgery.
Patient assisted transport	Government-funded patient assisted travel schemes have limitations and need to be improved. To enable cataract surgery, The Foundation covered gaps in funding to enable patients to travel from very remote areas and with escorts.
Working with partners	Strong relationships between the hospital, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and The Foundation were critical. The Intensives would not have been possible without these relationships.
Benefits to the workforce	Healthcare staff found working on the Intensives to be a rewarding experience to “give back to the community”.
Patient waiting lists	Surgery waiting times are difficult to estimate from medical records due to a lack of data and systems coordination, and the “hidden” time between referrals and outpatient appointments. 30% of the patients interviewed estimated that they waited more than two years to get cataract surgery.

Future implications

The Intensives serve two purposes:

- 1) To help clear the backlog for cataract surgery
- 2) To demonstrate and deliver more culturally responsive pathways to treatment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Foundation will continue to support Intensives where there is a need, whilst advocating for policy and funding changes to enable more timely and culturally safe cataract surgery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

