

Question on Notice
No. 70
Asked on 13 February 2014

MR SORENSEN asked the Minister for Health (MR SPRINGBORG)-

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise how the State Government is screening for avoidable blindness in Queensland's Indigenous communities and provide an update on the progress of programs introduced to support this screening?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for Hervey Bay for his question.

In 2013, the State Government donated \$5 million to the Diamond Jubilee Partnerships Ltd (DJP Ltd), a not-for-profit subsidiary of the Diamond Jubilee Trust Australia, to fund the Indigenous Diabetes Eyes and Screening project (otherwise known as the 'IDEAS Project'). This innovative two-year initiative aims to substantially reduce diabetes-related blindness and visual impairment among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland.

Diabetes affects one third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders over the age of 40. Many of these have some degree of visual impairment due to complications of diabetes, and some are at risk of permanent blindness due to an eye condition called diabetic retinopathy.

In the majority of cases, this blindness can be prevented by managing blood sugar levels, getting regular eye checks, and ensuring that problems are treated early. The IDEAS project will help with this by providing 27 Aboriginal Medical Services across Queensland with specialist medical support, education, and equipment for screening and treating for eye health problems.

In addition to providing telehealth links with medical specialists in Brisbane's Princess Alexandra Hospital, the IDEAS project is funding a mobile clinic called the IDEAS van. This will travel around nine regional hubs providing a base and state-of-the-art equipment for local and visiting specialists such as ophthalmologists, endocrinologists, optometrists and diabetes educators.

The hubs will be in Toowoomba, Charleville, Mount Isa, Townsville, Cairns, Mackay, Rockhampton, Hervey Bay and Morayfield. This approach allows people with diabetes to be screened and treated for eye problems in the familiar surroundings of local Aboriginal Medical Services.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service will extend this clinical support out beyond these nine hubs, providing much-needed diabetic eye health services to rural and remote communities.

To make all this happen, the Diamond Jubilee Partnership has been formed as a collaboration of many contributing organisations. These include: the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander

Health Council; the Royal Australian Colleges of Ophthalmologists and General Practitioners; the Royal Flying Doctor Service; the Queensland Eye Institute; and Diabetes Queensland. Private sector companies such as Volvo, Kurtz Transport, Device Technologies and JJ Richards and Sons have also been critical members of this partnership.

The IDEAS project is part of this Government's programme to help close the health gap for Indigenous people in Queensland. The Queensland Government's \$5 million donation was a tribute to Her Majesty the Queen following her Diamond Jubilee, and will create a lasting legacy of better eye health for thousands of Queenslanders.