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New eye and ear surgical services program makes impact

The new Eye and Ear Surgical Services Program, funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, has celebrated its first success with a recent visit to the Kimberley region.

The visit resulted in 20 patients who were predominately Senior Lore people, receiving timely treatment. The treatment has ensured these patients can continue to play important roles in the Arts and Law within their communities.

“The success was very much a team effort,” said Dr Angus Turner, the Ophthalmologist who performed the surgery. “Outreach programs rely on the local agencies to coordinate well. The assistance of WA Country Health Service to ensure the availability of theatres was a key factor in allowing the surgery to happen, and the liaison and communication between both government and local non-government agencies allowed for the visit to have the great impact that it did.”

The Program was initiated earlier this year in response to the long waitlists for patients needing eye and ear surgery. Rural Health West was invited to submit a business case to the Australian Government Department of Health, identifying clusters of greatest need.

“We were able to identify four main providers in the initial scope, who reported having long waitlists. These were predominately based in the Kimberley, Midwest, Goldfields and Tjuntjuntjara regions,” said Ms Vivienne Duggin the General Manager for Outreach Services at Rural Health West.

“Since then we have been in contact with other providers and services to determine areas of need and to coordinate and plan future visits.”

The main objective of the Program is to increase access to surgical interventions for Indigenous Western Australians with diagnosed eye and ear conditions, who are on a waitlist for surgery.

“It is anticipated that by providing patients with more timely access to treatment for their conditions, health outcomes will improve, which generally have a flow on effect to education and employment outcomes,” said Ms Duggin.

There are up to 65 visits scheduled for the remainder of the financial year, covering the Kimberley, Midwest, Goldfields (including the Lands) and Great Southern regions.

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As the leading rural health workforce agency for Western Australia, Rural Health West is a not-for-profit organisation funded by the State and Commonwealth Governments responsible for the recruitment and retention of a highly skilled sustainable health workforce to meet the needs to rural and remote Western Australians communities.