

MEDIA STATEMENT

Lions commitment to improving life in PNG through eye health

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, 5 September, 2019: Four years ago in 2016, the eye health for all Papua New Guineans was elevated by the long-term commitment from the Lions Club International Foundation (LCIF) to fund the building of the Lions National Resource Centre for Eye Health, in Port Moresby. Since the opening, the Centre has become an eye health hub supporting comprehensive services, workforce development, national spectacle distribution, advocacy and health promotion.

Last week, we celebrated a welcome visit to PNG by Brandon Williams and Garry Kenny from LCIF, who were joined by Leigh Cleave, Acting Executive Director, Brien Holden Vision Institute Foundation, Serge Resnikoff, Senior Consultant, International Health and Development, and Drew Keys, IAPB Western Pacific, Regional Program Manager.

Leigh Cleave, from the Foundation attended the visit in Port Moresby. "I am delighted to be here and support the outcomes achieved by our team, dedicated partners and funders like Lions Club International Foundation. Our programs over the last decade, collaboratively with PNG Eye Care and the Prevention of Blindness Committee, have helped enable significant impact within the communities here and its very encouraging to see such commitment to comprehensive services and sustainability of impact beyond the program life," she said.

Blindness and uncorrected vision impairment have a serious impact on individual lives in PNG, leaving a lasting effect on the economy of communities and the country, leading to loss of productivity, greater unemployment and increased health care costs.

Recent research figures show a very high national prevalence of vision impairment and blindness in PNG. Statistics indicate uncorrected vision impairment in people 50 years and older is 29.2%, with the major causes being the need for spectacles (45.7%) and cataract (35.2%).

Mrs Solomon, a local retired woman offered words of gratitude for the work being carried out by the Foundation and partners in PNG. "I am a patient at the new eye clinic, and I'm very happy to see the big changes happening that have happened here. I came here to have my eyes checked and a cataract removed. This was done very well and I found out during the care I received that I have Type 2 diabetes and I have been referred to the diabetic clinic. Thank you for the big help," she said

Samuel Koim, General Manager, PNG Eye Care spoke about positive impact the Lions National Resource Centre for Eye Health has had on the population. "For too long we saw a devastating and, sadly, an unnecessary toll on communities and individuals alike which could have been prevented with access to eye care. Since the inception of the NRC we have been able to work together to address and increase service provision, delivery and awareness within PNG. We are very grateful to Lions for their generous investment in the Lions National Resource Centre for Eye Health."

The urgent need for eye care in PNG is the focus of the ongoing initiative between PNG Eye Care, Brien Holden Vision Institute and the PNG and Australian governments to develop sustainable systems providing increased access to eye care for all local people. This collaborative relationship began in 2008 and has already achieved increased outcomes in eye care for tens of thousands of Papua New Guineans.



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About Brien Holden Vision Institute Foundation

Brien Holden Vision Institute Foundation is a global non-profit, non-governmental organisation who since 1998 has delivered sustainable eye care services, education and training programs in over 60 countries, providing eye care to over 14 million people at more than 400 eye care sites and training 250,000 eye care personnel.

PNG Eye Care is Papua New Guinea's only indigenous eye care non-government organisation. Established in 2008 as a capacity building initiative supported by Brien Holden Vision Institute, PNG Eye Care is committed to making eye care accessible and affordable for all Papua New Guineans.