

# Through the Eyes of an Outback Gentleman

The name Fred Hollows has been synonymous with members of the Indigenous community since the late Professor first began fighting to improve the health conditions of Indigenous people in the late 1970's.

Professor Hollows saw an urgent medical need for Indigenous people living in the Northern parts of Australia, to have access to not only eye care but health initiatives that would improve health and wellbeing overall.

Decades later in 1992, The Fred Hollows Foundation was established to further combat the needs Professor Hollows himself had facilitated all those years ago.

While maintaining a focus on eye health, the Foundation's Indigenous Program also branches out to focus on tackling the social determinants of poor health in Indigenous communities, and supporting the work of Aboriginal controlled organisations and health services.

One of the most integral parts of this work has been the Central Aus-

tralia Integrated Eye Health program. Serving a population of 55,000 people living in Central Australia, this aspect of The Foundation's work is one of the largest coordinated eye health programs in the world.

The Program is a partnership between The Australian Government, The Northern Territory Government, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation, The Eye Foundation and The Fred Hollows Foundation.

The long term aim of the program was to begin the long process of clearing the backlog of cataract and other eye diseases found in the Central Australian region. To achieve this, a number of intensive surgery sessions have been held at Alice Springs Hospital since 2007. During these weeks patients from as far north as Tennant Creek and as far south west as Docker River board a designated bush bus bound

for Alice. Throughout the week they receive sight restoring surgery that they would otherwise not have access to.

The success of this program can be seen on the smiling faces of the patients like Gilbray Alum.



Uncle Gilbray Alum of Elliot in the NT

Mr. Alum is 70 years' old and lives in the town of Elliott. Elliott is one of the most remote towns in the Northern Territory, situated halfway

between Darwin and Alice Springs.

Gilbray lost his sight to cataracts after droving the great cattle routes of Northern Australia for more than 30 years. He dreamed of taking the young men of Elliot out and teaching them how to hunt the traditional way.

On the day of his surgery, Gilbray was picked up from his home and taken to Alice Springs Hospital almost 1,500 km away.

After travelling such a far distance for surgery, Gilbray had to wait in the busy halls, while surgeons looked after other patients. Through all his waiting, he was polite to the doctors and nurses, and cared after other patients whose sight was far worse than his own.

After waiting so patiently, Gilbray was finally admitted into surgery. However, his operation didn't run as smoothly as others.

Dr Tim Henderson operated on Gilbray saying "It was quite difficult

because he had corneal scarring which makes the central area quite hazy. But the operation went very well, and we managed to get the entire lens clouding out."

His sight finally restored, Gilbray can now go hunting with his son Michael. Most importantly, for Gilbray, his surgery means that he can now claim back his manhood and pass the torch of cultural knowledge onto the young men of Elliot.

He can resume his position within his community as a strong role model and leader to these young men, who otherwise might have no-one from whom they can learn the traditional ways - Gilbray can now see these young men flourish and take in the knowledge that preserves their culture and dignity.

Since 2007, the program has restored sight to over 460 Indigenous people and remains shining testimony that positive outcomes are possible when Government's and organisations work closely with Indigenous communities.

## Emergency Response improving community safety



An increase in police in remote Northern Territory Indigenous communities is helping build trust, leading to more reports of domestic violence, child abuse and neglect.

On the eve of the three year anniversary of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), the Australian Government has released the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory Monitoring Report.

The report shows that according to police data, confirmed child abuse and neglect reports have risen from 106 in 2007 to 275 in 2009.

Seventy-seven per cent of this increase is in 18 communities which did not have a police presence prior to the NTER but now have one.

The report also reveals there was a 75 per cent increase in the number of domestic violence incidents recorded by police in the NTER communities from 2007 to 2009.

And the number of convictions for assault across the NTER communities also increased by 28 per cent from 2007 to 2009.

Greater numbers of police

in remote communities means that people are more likely to report crimes.

Police are working to build trust and relationships with local communities.

The Report reveals that there are more than 60 additional police deployed to communities; night patrols operating in 80 communities; more than 20 safe places and five upgraded permanent police stations in Maningrida, Gunbalanya, Ali Curung, Hermannsburg and Yuendumu.

The report also found that in the six months to 31 December 2009, night patrols transported more than 30,000 people and 550 people were taken to a safe house.

The positive role of policing was also demonstrated in a study undertaken for the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency and the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service released earlier this year.

This survey of Aboriginal people in 14 of the 18 communities with a police presence as a result of the NTER found that around 50 per cent of people said that alcohol and violence was less of a problem in their community

because of the police.

Strengthening community safety in Northern Territory remote Indigenous communities is a key priority for the Australian Government.

Decades of neglect cannot be fixed overnight - we require a sustained effort from all levels of government and much more remains to be done.

The Australian Government is also committed to supporting leadership in Aboriginal communities to target the underlying causes of violence and break the cycle.

Taking ownership of these problems is no easy task for communities, especially when people are already living in tough conditions. But progress is being made and the Government will continue to work in partnership with Indigenous Australians to drive change on the ground.

To view the report visit [www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter\\_reports/closing\\_gap\\_NT\\_jul\\_dec\\_2009/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter_reports/closing_gap_NT_jul_dec_2009/Pages/default.aspx) <[http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter\\_reports/closing\\_gap\\_NT\\_jul\\_dec\\_2009/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter_reports/closing_gap_NT_jul_dec_2009/Pages/default.aspx)>

## Melissa in Channel 9's Hot Seat



Renowned Indigenous author, Melissa Lucashenko, will appear on Channel 9's Hot Seat at 5.30pm Tuesday 29th June. When National Indigenous Times spoke with Melissa this week she maintained her position of confidentiality on the outcome but she did say "I was so nervous my jaw was shaking!"



Are you a leader in your family, community or organisation?

Do you guide and inspire people around you?

Continue your journey to becoming a stronger leader and join the thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are making a positive difference and improving the lives of Indigenous Australians through the Indigenous Leadership Program.

Register for the 2010-11 program today. Visit [www.fahcsia.gov.au/indigenous](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/indigenous) and search for Indigenous Leadership Programs. For more information call the leadership information hotline on 1800 724 185 (free call). If you would like to contact us by email do so at [indigenous.leadership.development@fahcsia.gov.au](mailto:indigenous.leadership.development@fahcsia.gov.au)

