



New facility boosts eye health in the Pacific

By Online Editor

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New Zealand's Acting Head of Mission to Fiji, Phillip Taula; Director of the Pacific Eye Institute, Dr John Szetu; and Australia's Acting High Commissioner to Fiji, Judith Robinson, stand outside the newly completed Pacific Eye Institute in Suva

Ophthalmologists, doctors and nurses from around the Pacific will now be able to get eye care training in a state-of-the-art facility in Fiji.

Jointly funded by the Australian and New Zealand Governments, the newly constructed \$2 million (NZ \$2.7 million) Pacific Eye Institute (PEI) buildings in Suva meets an urgent need for an improved training and treatment facility.

Australian Foreign Minister, Kevin Rudd said the old campuses saw over 20,000 patients last year in cramped conditions.

“The new buildings house training rooms for eye-care nurses, doctors and technicians from across the region, along with operating theatres, a laser-treatment room, an optical laboratory, offices and a resource centre.”

New Zealand Foreign Minister, Murray McCully said that up to 80,000 people in the Pacific were blind, and a further 250,000 visually-impaired.

“Making a major improvement to a person’s sight is often not especially expensive or difficult if there are qualified health professionals on hand to diagnose and treat people via simple surgical procedures,” Mr McCully said.

“Research suggests that through better access to eye health care and treatment 75 per cent of blindness cases are preventable.”

In 2010 PEI outreach teams undertook 5108 consultations and 1101 surgeries – including 878 cataract removals in Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, PNG, Samoa and Fiji.

This funding is a key component of Fred Hollows New Zealand’s A\$13.5 million Pacific Regional Blindness Prevention Program (PRBPP), which is funded by the Australian and New Zealand Governments in partnership with the Fred Hollows Foundation.

The Australia Government has contributed \$9.8 million over three years (2008-09 to 2010-11) to the PRBPP, and the New Zealand Government has contributed \$3.7 million.

SOURCE: DFAT/MFAT/PACNEWS