The Northern Territory Government and the Fred Hollows Foundation are teaming up to deliver eye services in the Territory with consultations and treatments being offered at Katherine Hospital this week.

Health Minister Robyn Lambley was in Katherine today to witness first-hand the services that are being offered by two visiting ophthalmologists.

“During this week, the aim is to deliver 150 ophthalmology consultations to people of the Katherine region and to carry out 30 cataract surgeries,” Mrs Lambley said.

“Earlier this year, the Fred Hollows Foundation received funding from the Department of Health and Ageing to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cataract Surgery Intensives Pilot Project.”

“The more services we can provide to people in remote, rural and regional areas, the more likely people are to get the services that they need,” Mrs Lambley said.

“This is a successful partnership that is having a significant impact on improving Indigenous health outcomes across the Northern Territory.

“This project aims to reduce the cataract surgery waitlist for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents within the Top End and will support the delivery of up to 150 cataract surgical procedures by the end of the year.”

The services in Katherine this week are being supported by clinical and administration staff from the Fred Hollows Foundation, the Royal Darwin Hospital and Katherine Hospital and includes ophthalmologists, orthoptists and Indigenous liaison officers.

Data from the National Indigenous Eye Health Survey (2008) and the Road Map to Close the Gap for Vision, shows:

- Blinding cataract is 12 times more common in Indigenous adults but the rates of cataract surgery are seven times lower
- Waiting times for cataract surgery for Indigenous adults is 88 per cent longer
- Vision loss from cataract is more common in very remote areas
- Cataracts cause 32 per cent of blindness in Indigenous adults and 27 per cent of low vision
- Only 65 per cent of those with vision loss caused by cataracts have received surgery.

Further surgeries are scheduled for patients in Alice Springs on 24-26 September, with another visit planned for Katherine on 20-22 November.

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