

Eyes Wide Open: The emerging threat of vision loss in the Pacific

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Purpose

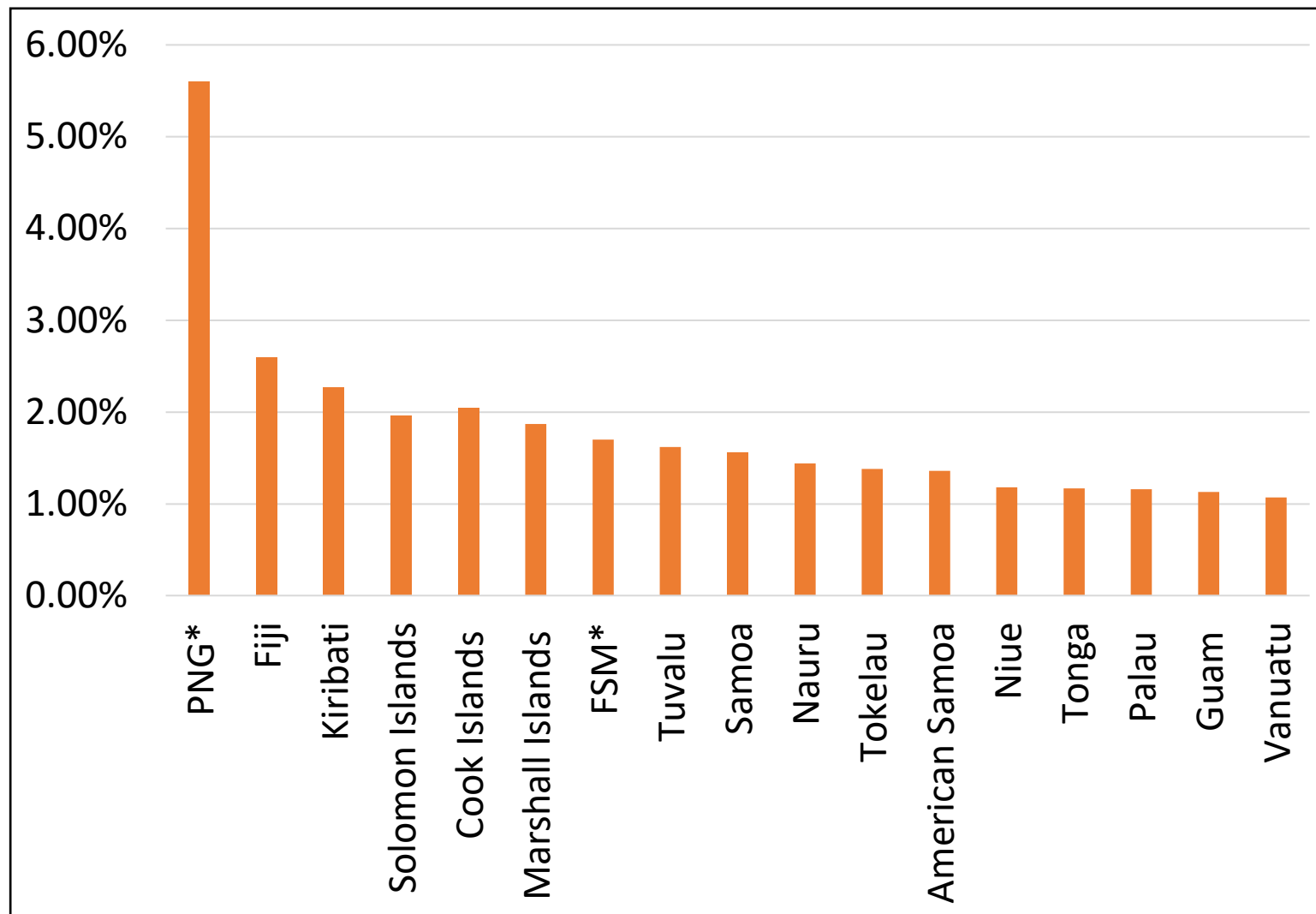
- Provide an update on the current status of vision loss in the region and rising eye health needs.
- Propose four actionable areas for consideration by the Pacific Heads of Health

Status of vision loss in the Pacific

- The leading causes of blindness in the Pacific are cataract, uncorrected refractive error, and diabetic retinopathy.
- Approximately 30% of people with diabetes are likely to develop diabetic retinopathy, however, in some PICs, up to 69% of people with diabetes have some form of retinopathy.
- Prevalence of vision loss is projected to markedly increase and epidemiology of eye diseases will significantly change.
- However, the real evidence of the burden of vision loss in the Pacific is unknown.



Estimated Prevalence of Blindness



Note: There is no blindness estimation for French Polynesia & New Caledonia

*PNG: Papua New Guinea; FSM: Federated States of Micronesia

What do health decision makers need to think about over the next 5 years?



- The eye health workforce is insufficient to meet current population needs, nor keep pace with the growing rates of diabetes.
- There are varying levels of eye care services across PICs with limited integration with other services.
- Few countries have national eye health plans and policies.
- There is limited availability of eye health information for decision making.
- There is limited targeted investments to strengthen eye health systems and progress towards universal health coverage (UHC) for eye care.

Pacific Heads of Health are invited to:

1. Recognize the growing burden of vision loss in the region, particularly diabetic retinopathy due to rising rates of diabetes.
2. Include eye care in human resource planning to further develop a highly-skilled eye care workforce that can increasingly meet complex population eye needs.
3. Support the integration of eye health as part of their national health planning to drive national eye health priorities to progress towards integrated people-centred eye care as part of universal health coverage (UHC).
4. Invest in collecting eye health data and information to better understand the true burden of vision loss and enable policy development, prioritization, and reporting.

The illustration shows several traditional Pacific Islands outrigger canoes (vaka) on a sea with a complex, repeating geometric pattern. The canoes are brown with light-colored sails. The background is a light blue sky above a greenish sea with intricate patterns. The overall style is traditional and cultural.

Discussion