

Born Too Soon: Saving Sight in Premature Babies



Background

Roughly one in 10 babies are born preterm, and in India – where more than three million babies were born premature in 2020 alone – this is a growing public health challenge. These fragile infants are at risk of Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP), an eye condition that can cause vision loss and blindness if left untreated. However, when caught early, the condition is highly treatable.

In Moradabad, India, Operation Eyesight worked with our longtime partner, the C L Gupta Eye Institute (CLGEI) to connect neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) across the region to the hospital's ROP unit to screen and treat ROP in more infants.



Method

The initial project established the ROP unit at CLGEI and a mobile screening team to screen infants at neonatal units across Moradabad District. During Phase II of the project, from July 2024 to March 2025, the project was expanded to include another five districts in the area. The expansion included the following activities:

Strengthening of ROP unit

Rotary partners donated critical equipment, including a portable imaging system, a specialized laser used in treatment of ROP, and a van to transport the mobile screening team and their equipment to NICUs across the region.

Networking with NICUs

We established a network of 28 NICUs across five districts.

Launch of IEC materials

We created Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials to raise awareness about the importance of catching ROP early among healthcare providers and parents.

Mobile screening and treatment services

To overcome geographical barriers, we established a mobile screening unit staffed by a qualified optometrist trained in ROP screening and laser treatment. Depending on the severity of the condition, the optometrist provides treatment on the spot or refers the infants to the ROP unit at CLGEI for more complex treatments.

Teleophthalmology

The project also allows specialists from CLGEI to diagnose ROP cases remotely and make recommendations and referrals, significantly expanding access to this specialized care.

Results

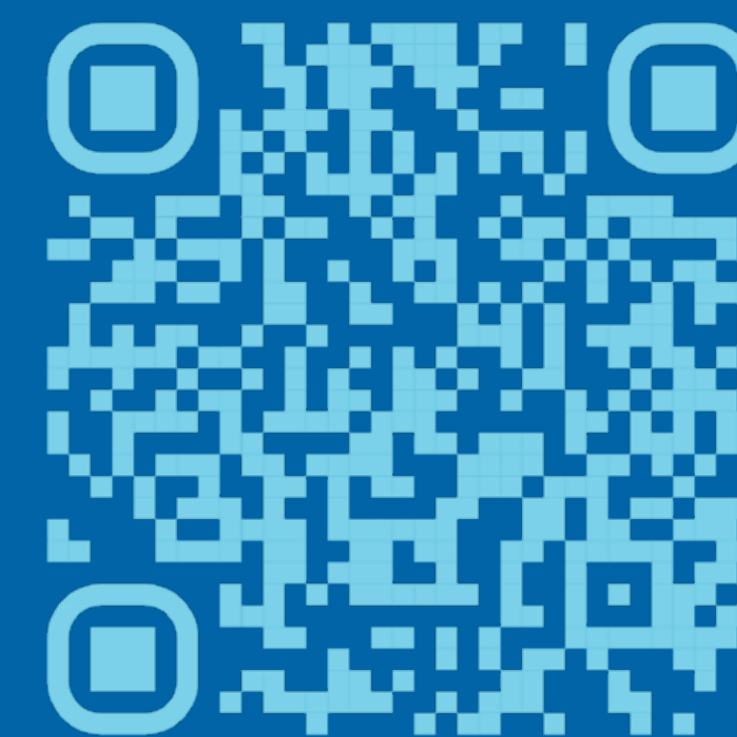
There were significant achievements made during Phase II of the project, from July 2024 to March 2025:

- 685 preterm babies screened
- 127 preterm babies identified with ROP
- 54 preterm babies treated with laser
- 35 preterm babies treated with intravitreal injections
- 264 NICU staff and other government frontline workers received specialized training

Next Steps

Working together with CLGEI, we will continue to improve the ROP Project by boosting service delivery and increasing access to vital eye care for premature infants in the region.

We will make regular visits to project sites to review progress and fix any emerging issues. A key focus will be making sure all premature babies diagnosed with ROP receive timely treatment.



Watch this video to learn more about Phase I of our ROP Project.

Project implemented by:

Operation Eyesight Universal
C L Gupta Eye Institute

Rotary focus area:

Disease control

Project supported by:

Rotary Club of Brantford, ON, Canada
Rotary Club at Calgary Stampede Park, AB, Canada
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