

\$100,000 grant is out of sight

By ANDREA STEWART

WHERE is the \$100,000 the NSW Health Department claims to have contributed to glaucoma prevention?

Its whereabouts appear to be a mystery — even to the department.

The department said in September that \$10,000 a year had been provided for the past 10 years towards the program.

But nobody seems to know where the money has gone or whether a glaucoma prevention program exists.

The department admitted yesterday it was perplexed.

The confusion follows questions put to the department by Albury glaucoma victim Mr Rolf Kaiser.

Mr Kaiser, 48, started a personal war against glaucoma three years ago.

He bought a caravan, withdrew his life savings and set off to tell Australia about the blinding disease.

When funds hit rock bottom Mr Kaiser approached the then NSW Opposition health spokesman, Mr Peter Collins, seeking a financial commitment.

Mr Collins obliged with an election promise he has failed to honor since the election of the Greiner Government.

The Health Department, pressed by The Border Mail in September, claimed it had been adequately funding a glaucoma prevention program through NSW hospitals.

The department said it had provided \$10,000 a year for 10 years.

A suspicious Mr Kaiser contacted Border District hospitals, Wagga hospitals, the South-West regional health department in Albury and community health centres.

No one had heard of the program, let alone received any funds.

An angry Mr Kaiser approached

Mystery of 'missing' money has department on the run

the member for Albury, Mr Ian Glachan, and together they wrote three letters to the Health Department seeking answers.

Mr Kaiser's only response was a reply from the department stating "the matter is under consideration".

The Border Mail again contacted the department last week and asked why the hospitals had not heard of the program.

Mr Collins was unavailable for comment, but his spokesman, Mr Wayne Geddes, suddenly took a new tack.

Mr Geddes said it appeared the money had been given to the Lions Club Save Sight Foundation, run in association with the Sydney Eye Hospital.

The Border Mail did its own research and found that the Lions Club Save Sight Foundation was part of the Save Sight and Eye Health Institute of NSW.

The institute's director, Prof Frank Bilson, of Sydney, said that, while the institute ran its own glaucoma programs, it had never received any \$10,000 grants from the NSW Government.

Prof Bilson said the institute was



● Mr Kaiser

funded by the NSW and ACT Lions Clubs and through private donations.

No Government money was involved.

A further call to Mr Geddes led to further confusion.

Mr Geddes said he was not 100 per cent sure the Government was giving money to the Lions Clubs Save Sight Foundation.

In fact, he was not even sure about the figure of \$10,000.

"I was originally told that it was \$10,000 a year, but I don't know if that is correct," he said.

Mr Geddes said his sources — from within the department — were "extremely vague".

"I myself have been trying to get the answers," he said.

"But I am trying to deal with the bureaucracy of the department, which is not easy."

For his part, Mr Kaiser thinks the whole set-up stinks.

"I have come to the conclusion that the Minister for Health shows total incompetence in the way he handles this important issue," he said.

File 250
Details page 26