Ohio’s Vision:
More Than Meets the Eye

Ohio’s Aging Eye
Public Private Partnership
A statewide collaboration preparing for the growth of aging eye challenges in Ohio

2014 Report to the Governor and General Assembly
A Message from our Co-Chairs

The current population of people with vision impairment and age-related eye diseases is large and growing rapidly. When it comes to vision impairment, there is **More than Meets the Eye!** People with vision impairment are generally more likely to have poorer health and multiple chronic health conditions. These circumstances interact and threaten one’s ability to work, to be independent, and to have a high quality of life.

Both the prevalence and economic impact of vision problems in Ohio has increased significantly according to two recent national studies: *Vision Problems in the U.S. Prevalence of Adult Vision Impairment and Eye Disease in America* (2012) and *The Economic Burden of Vision Loss and Eye Disorders in the United States* (2013). The total estimated cases of vision problems in Ohio is 3,623,583 and the estimated financial impact due to vision problems, refractive error, visual impairment and blindness is $5.4 billion annually!

With this growth in age-related eye diseases and vision loss comes an increasingly significant personal concern for older Ohioans, their families and the public health system. If appropriate preventive steps are not taken, costs will skyrocket as life expectancy increases and Ohio’s population ages. The number of Ohio residents with impaired vision, including blindness, could double in the next three decades.

Ohio’s Aging Eye Public Private Partnership (AEPPP) presents this report to highlight the need for an organized, integrated approach to increasing our preventive efforts including increased education and access to proper vision care and vision research.

The AEPPP was formed in 2003 to prepare for the growth of aging eye challenges in Ohio. It is a volunteer-driven statewide collaboration that addresses issues related to vision care public policy, vision care services, public and professional awareness and vision research that affect the quality of life for Ohio’s elders now and in the future. Our efforts are supported by an executive resolution by Governor John R. Kasich. The resolution encourages all Ohioans to join with public and private entities in understanding the importance of vision care.

We offer our services and resources to government leaders, public health professionals, health care providers, business and community leaders, and consumers as we work together to curtail the growth of vision problems in Ohio.
The Growth of Vision Loss

Data from the 2012 Vision Problems in the U.S. report on the four leading causes of vision loss indicate alarming increases in Ohio since the 2000 report was issued.

- 88,546 people age 50 and older have age-related macular degeneration, a **25 percent increase**.
- 991,628 people age 40 and older have cataracts, a **13 percent increase**.
- 105,889 people age 40 and older have open-angle glaucoma, a **15 percent increase**.
- 284,631 people age 40 and older have diabetic retinopathy, a **31 percent increase**.

An estimated 3.6 million Ohioans have vision problems. The number of Ohio residents with impaired vision, including blindness, could double in the next three decades.

Factors that Impact the Growth of Vision Loss:

- Poor health habits including smoking, physical inactivity, and poor nutrition increase the incidence of vision loss.
- Chronic disease (including diabetes and high blood pressure) and eye injuries increase the likelihood of vision loss.
- Lack of regular professional eye exams impact vision loss because many eye diseases, like glaucoma, are asymptomatic.
- Poor health literacy can decrease the ability to follow-up on necessary care, which increases risk for vision loss.
- The obesity epidemic impacts the incidence of type 2 diabetes and therefore the number of people with diabetic eye disease increases.
- Unemployment and the lack of affordable health care benefits (including high deductibles) or understanding of those benefits affects access to vision care and the ability to detect and treat eye diseases early.

Why this is Important for Policymakers: The Cost of Vision Loss

Vision loss and blindness can:

- Limit one’s independence, productivity and ability to work.
- Increase the likelihood of a fall by fifty percent for people 65+.
- Increase the likelihood of depression.
- Increase the incidence of cognitive decline and Alzheimer’s disease.
- Increase the need for nursing home care

Fifty percent of all blindness can be prevented through early detection and treatment – which can significantly improve the quality of life for potentially affected Ohioans and their families.

The economic impact of vision problems in Ohio is **$5.4 Billion annually** in both direct and indirect costs.

Direct costs of approximately $2.6 billion include medical costs for diagnosed disorders, medical costs attributable to low vision, medical vision aids, vision assistive devices and adaptations, and direct services including special education and assistance programs.

Indirect costs of approximately $2.8 billion capture the burden of consequences of low vision, including productivity losses, long-term care, informal care, and the costs of transfer and entitlement programs.

- Vision problems disproportionately affect certain racial and ethnic groups. People who are African-American and Hispanic are four times more likely to have glaucoma than Caucasians. Caucasians are more likely to develop Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD).

---

**Total Impact of Vision Problems in Ohio: $5.4 Billion Annually**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>$2.53B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Productivity</td>
<td>$1.89B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-Term Care</td>
<td>$788M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Indirect</td>
<td>$137M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Direct</td>
<td>$67M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

2014 Report to the Governor and General Assembly - 3 -
Rick’s Story: More Than Meets the Eye!

“As I usually do, I had a routine eye exam by my optometrist in the fall of 2008. The big difference that year was that I was found to have increased intraocular pressure (IOP), which is a precursor to glaucoma. In early 2009, I went back for a re-check and the elevated pressures were confirmed. I was referred to an ophthalmologist and the pressures were still elevated. Fortunately, there is good news! Because of early detection, there is no vision loss and no damage to my optic nerve. I am currently using eye drops every day to treat the disease. I never thought this would happen to me. There wasn’t even any history of glaucoma in my family and I had no symptoms! My experience emphasizes the importance of early detection through routine eye examinations and following treatment protocol. My story is one of hope through prevention!”

Ohio’s Aging Eye Public Private Partnership Policy and Program Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed by Ohio’s Aging Eye Public Private Partnership. They serve as guidelines for the partnership in initiating or responding to public policy or programming initiatives.

1. Appoint an individual or a coordinating position for aging vision in the next biennial budget within the Ohio Department of Health to coordinate vision preservation and educational activities across Ohio.

2. Support on-going use of the Optional Vision Module of the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in cooperation with the Ohio Department of Health to provide outcome data on which to base statewide public health vision programming.

3. Maintain preventive vision care services for adults in the state Medicaid budget.

4. Encourage the Ohio Association of Community Health Centers and its partners to provide technical assistance and support to Ohio’s Federally Qualified Health Centers that focus on adult vision loss and provide training and technical assistance to Health Center professionals to implement adult vision assessment in a general wellness exam and emphasize the urgency of professional vision care for patients with diabetes.

5. Support measures that increase vision screening practices among providers of primary health care in the medical home and other sites.


7. Establish adult vision screening as an essential benefit to the Medicare annual medical exam.

8. Develop a state tax incentive for the donors of in-kind professional services (such as comprehensive eye exams and eye surgeries) that benefit vulnerable populations in need of care.

9. Support health insurance coverage for basic vision care, vision education and vision rehabilitation services.

10. Support vision-related Summits which support awareness and encourage research collaboration and expansion.

“A new study from the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), investigated the association between visual impairment and health-related quality of life among adults aged 65 and older. According to the report, poor health-related quality of life is strongly associated with the severity of self-reported visual impairment among people aged 65 and older. Participants who reported "moderate/severe" visual impairment showed a strong, consistent association with poor health-related quality of life.”
Fall Prevention: More than Meets the Eye

The STEADY U Ohio initiative is now in its second year of raising awareness of the falls epidemic among older adults and sharing resources to help Ohioans prevent a life-changing fall. One in three older adults will fall this year, and vision loss is a large, though under-reported, contributor.

Falls are not a normal part of aging, and most falls can be prevented. Maintaining good vision health through the prevention and early detection of age-related eye diseases, and proper use of corrective eyewear remain some of the most effective strategies to reduce the risk of falls in older adults. Vision is one of three systems that help our bodies maintain balance (along with the inner ear and body awareness). If any of these systems grow weaker or fail with age, we become more dependent on the other two. If two of these systems become impaired, the individual’s risk of falls and fall-related injuries increases significantly.

Common Causes of Visual Impairment and Blindness

Hyperopia, also known as farsightedness, is a common type of refractive error where distant objects may be seen more clear than objects that are near. Hyperopia can be successfully treated with corrective eyewear.

Myopia, also known as nearsightedness, is a common type of refractive error where close objects appear clearly, but distant objects appear blurry. Myopia can be successfully treated with corrective eyewear.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a disease that gradually destroys sharp, central vision. Risk factors include: race (more common in white populations), smoking, obesity, gender (women are more likely to have AMD) and family history. Treatments include medications injected into the back of the eye, laser treatments and vitamins. Treatments can stop or slow the progression of the disease. There is no cure.

Cataract is a clouding of the eye’s lens that can be successfully treated surgically by removal of the lens and replacement with an intraocular lens. Vision with cataract can appear cloudy or blurry, colors may seem faded, and you may notice a lot of glare and have decreased night or low-light vision. Cataract is more common after age 55.

Diabetic retinopathy is a complication of diabetes that results from damage to the blood vessels inside the eye’s retina. Patches of vision loss, cloudy vision, glare sensitivity and decreased night or low light sensitivity is associated with diabetic retinopathy. The risks of diabetic retinopathy are reduced through disease management and regular, professional eye exams. Treatments that can slow progression include: drug therapy, laser treatments, and vitrectomy. There is no cure.

Glaucoma causes the loss of peripheral or side vision. Once vision is lost, it cannot be restored. Remaining vision usually can be saved with treatments including medicines, laser trabeculoplasty, conventional surgery or a combination of any of these. Glaucoma is more common after age 40, among blacks and in people with diabetes.
The Partnership’s Activities are More than Meets the Eye!

Ohio’s Aging Eye Public Private Partnership (AEPPP) educates constituents about the importance of vision care and advocates for programs and policies that help prevent the growth of vision loss. Here’s how some AEPPP member organizations have joined forces to raise awareness and integrate information about eye health and vision loss prevention in 2014.

- Jackie Davis, OD, MPH from The Ohio State University and Laura Schwartz from Prevent Blindness discussed aging eye diseases and the need for early detection and treatment on the talk radio show Senior Agenda with Lisa Stockdale on February 27.

- The Ohio Department of Aging STEADY U Ohio initiative, now in its second year, emphasizes the importance of healthy vision in fall prevention. See steadyu.ohio.gov

- Fellowships Awards were presented to Alicia Powers from The Ohio State University, Lucy Coughlin from Northeast Ohio Medical University, and Kate Farhang from the Cleveland Clinic Foundation, Cole Eye Institute, to support their vision related research. They presented their research at a scientific forum on Nov. 20, held at VSP. Dr. Julie Racine, keynote speaker, from Nationwide Children’s Hospital, spoke about challenges for women in science.

- Vision care resources were provided to seniors who attended “Welcome to Medicare” events hosted by the Ohio Senior Health Insurance Information Program (OSHIIP) of the Ohio Department of Insurance.

- Prevent Blindness provided adult vision screening services and training for volunteers throughout the state.

- Information regarding the impact of vision loss in Ohio was shared with legislators and their staff at an AEPPP Legislative Briefing on March 19.

- Dr. Andrew Hartwick from The Ohio State University College of Optometry and Stephanie Koscher from Prevent Blindness were interviewed on QFM96 regarding the Aging Eye Summit and glaucoma.

- On June 25, Northeast Ohio Medical University, the AEPPP and Prevent Blindness hosted a Summit entitled, “The Aging Eye: Putting Pressure on Glaucoma.”

- The Partnership’s Activities are More than Meets the Eye!

AEPPP Resources

The AEPPP challenges senior-serving organizations to integrate messaging regarding vision preservation, the need for early detection and treatment, and healthy lifestyles into existing health programs. The following resources are available from the Aging Eye Partnership. 1-800-301-2020 ext. 112 or ohio.preventblindness.org/ohios-aging-eye-public-private-partnership

Website - View the background, goals and membership of the AEPPP. Explorer studies, fact sheets and other resources on the leading causes of vision loss among adult Ohioans. Learn about AEPPP-sponsored activities. ohio.preventblindness.org/ohios-aging-eye-public-private-partnership

Ohio Vision Resources Guide - Look up telephone numbers and websites to assist individuals and organizations in finding vision care, prescription assistance, rehabilitation services, educational materials and access to low or no cost eye exams.

Vision Problems in Ohio: The Prevalence and Cost of Vision Problem - Learn about the prevalence and economic impact of adult vision impairment and age-related eye disease for each of the 88 Ohio counties and on a statewide basis.

The Economic Burden of Vision Loss and Eye Disorders in the United States - This 2013 national report describes the economic burden of the leading age-related eye diseases and refractive error. It also looks at the economic impact of vision impairment and blindness.

Vision Fact Sheets - Learn about an array of vision health issues. ohio.preventblindness.org/fact-sheets

Clinical Studies in Eye Disease - Find the latest list of clinical trials recruiting patients. clinicaltrials.gov or ohio.preventblindness.org/clinical-studies-eye-disease-0
Adult Vision Screening Training - Vision screening training, equipment, and certification is available to health care providers, social service providers, aging network providers and community groups so that they are able to provide vision screenings and referrals for the populations they serve. 1-800-301-2020 Ext. 112

EyeWatch Presenter Training and Toolkit - This program decreases the incidence of preventable vision loss through promotion of healthy lifestyles, early detection and treatment, and increased use of eye care access. The toolkit contains presentations on age-related eye diseases, vision resources, healthy living and more. 1-800-301-2020 ext. 112

Evidence-Based Prevention and Self-Management Programs - The Ohio Departments of Aging and Health, along with Ohio’s Area Agencies on Aging offer a menu of healthy aging programs. They are community-based workshops that help participants learn proven strategies to manage chronic disease, diabetes, depression and the fear of falling. 1-866-243-5678 or www.aging.ohio.gov.

AMD Awareness Makes a Difference - Prevent Blindness offers a free magnetic Amsler grid (used to monitor a person’s central vision) that can help identify vision abnormalities linked to AMD. The grid may be placed on a refrigerator or medicine cabinet for daily use. preventblindness.org/age-related-macular-degeneration-amd.

Diabetic Eye Disease Educator Program - This course is designed to teach outreach personnel and allied health professionals about the signs, symptoms and complications of the secondary diseases of diabetes (diabetic retinopathy, cataract and glaucoma). diabetes.preventblindness.org/

Glaucoma Educator Course - This self-guided course for healthcare professionals, community health educators, diabetes educators, and anyone responsible for diabetes education equips educators with patient education messages about glaucoma and strategies for prevention and early diagnosis. The online course includes a post-test, downloadable participant guide and patient education fact sheets. ohio.preventblindness.org/living-glaucoma

Women’s Eye Health - Women have a greater chance of being blind or visually impaired than men. “See Jane See” is designed to help women find the information and resources needed to enjoy a lifetime of healthy vision. seejanesee.preventblindness.org/

Living Well with Low Vision - This resource offers those with low vision and their caregivers a variety of tools, including a self-help guide to nonvisual skills, a visual skills workbook for people with age-related macular degeneration, a guide to caring for people who are visually impaired, and a range of resource directories, including a searchable database of more than 1,500 paratransit services around the country. lowvision.preventblindness.org

Medicare beneficiaries, especially those at risk for or diagnosed with a variety of diseases, are eligible for a number of vision-related services.

Medicare does not generally cover the costs of routine eye exams, with some exceptions. Medicare does help cover the exam if you have diabetes or are at risk for glaucoma. Medicare provides annual coverage for glaucoma screenings for individuals considered to be at high risk for the disease:

- Individuals with a family history of glaucoma (blood parent or sibling).
- Individuals with diabetes (either diet-controlled, oral-agent controlled, or insulin-dependent).
- African Americans age 50 and older who meet eligibility requirements for Medicare.
- Hispanics age 65 or older.

Medicare provides coverage for cataract surgery and treatment for age-related macular degeneration and glaucoma. To learn more about your Medicare benefits, contact the Ohio Senior Health Insurance Information Program (OSHIIP).

1-800-686-1578
www.insurance.ohio.gov

Medicaid provides coverage for vision care for adults at or below 138 percent of poverty guidelines. Vision coverage includes vision screening as part of a well patient visit, and an eye exam and glasses every other year for adults age 21-59, and an eye exam and glasses every year for ages 60-64. www.medicaid.ohio.gov or call 1-800-324-8680.

The Health Insurance Exchange established by the Affordable Care Act offers plan options that include vision screening as part of a well-patient exam with a primary care provider and an annual comprehensive eye exam. Individuals at or below 400 percent of poverty may qualify for subsidies to offset the cost of the insurance plan. HealthCare.gov or 1-800-318-2596.

“Insuring Your Eyes in Ohio” is available at ohio.preventblindness.org/insuring-your-eyes
Financial Supporters

The work of Ohio’s Aging Eye Public Private Partnership is supported entirely by donated funds, products, and services from member organizations, and contributions from private sources. Prevent Blindness serves as the fiscal agent for the Partnership. Support for educational materials, advocacy, printing, supplies, and meeting expenses have been provided by the following organizations:

Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED)
Ohio Department of Aging
Ohio Department of Health
Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired
Prevent Blindness
VSP

The Vision Research Fellowship Program is supported by a grant from the Sarah E. Slack Prevention of Blindness Fund, Muskingum County Community Foundation and The Levin Family Foundation

Sources

Ohio Department of Health and the 2012 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (CDC)

2012 Fifth Edition of Vision Problems in the U.S., Prevent Blindness America and the National Eye Institute, Wittenborn, John S. & Rein, David B.