

# Partnering to Preserve Sight

Report to the Governor, the Ohio General Assembly, and the Citizens of Ohio



## Ohio's Aging Eye Public Private Partnership

A statewide collaboration preparing for the  
growth of aging eye challenges in Ohio

## ***Governor DeWine, Members of the Ohio General Assembly and citizens:***

An estimated 3.6 million Ohioans have vision problems. As our population ages, this number will only increase. Since its inception in 2003, Ohio's Aging Eye Public Private Partnership (AEPPP) has worked to reduce the incidence of vision loss in Ohio. The AEPPP uses the power of collaboration by partnering to preserve sight. Partner organizations address issues related to vision care public policy, vision care services, public and professional awareness, and vision research.

The impact of vision loss on individuals, families, and communities in Ohio is a significant public health concern. The estimated financial burden to the Ohio economy due to vision problems, refractive errors, visual impairment, and blindness is \$5.4 billion annually.

(source: [ohiovisionproblems.preventblindness.org/overview/](http://ohiovisionproblems.preventblindness.org/overview/))

The Ohio Department of Aging, collaborating with the AEPPP, The Ohio State University College of Optometry, and the Ohio Affiliate of Prevent Blindness, received funding from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention and the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors to participate in the Vision and Eye Health Initiative. The initiative aims to improve vision and eye health through interventions that advance vision and eye health as public health priorities.



### ***Highlights of the work of the AEPPP and the Vision and Eye Health Initiative include:***

- The Aging Eye Summit: Our Bodies-Our Vision presented in conjunction with Northeast Ohio Medical University with a focus on vision and chronic disease;
- Adult Vision Screening and HealthyEyes training offered to individuals serving the aging network throughout the state, with the addition of a module on vision and diabetes;
- Evidence-based healthy aging programs that help participants learn strategies to manage diabetes, depression, and the risk of falling;
- The Aging Eye Partnership pivoted from in person training to offering on-line self-instructional training and live webinar events with great success in 2020
- Three Vision Research Fellowships awarded in April to support their studies into the causes of, and treatments for, sight-robbing diseases. The fellows presented their work at the Vision Research Scientific Forum at The Ohio State University in November.

I encourage government leaders, public health professionals, health care providers, business and community leaders, patients, and all Ohioans to work together to stop the growth of vision problems in Ohio. To that end, we offer our resources and services to you.



**Co-Chair**

**Rafat R. Ansari, Ph.D., Fellow SPIE**

NASA Senior Scientist (retired)

Vision Research and Human Health Diagnostics

Laboratory NASA John H. Glenn Research Center



# The Four Most Common Causes of Visual Impairment and Blindness in Ohio:

*Early detection and treatment are key to preserving sight. Many eye diseases have no symptoms and require a comprehensive eye exam to detect. In most cases, once vision is lost, it cannot be restored. However, treatment can stop or slow the progression of the disease.*



**Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD)** gradually destroys sharp, central vision. Risk factors include smoking, obesity, and family history. It is more common in females and white populations.

**88,546 Ohioans age 50 and older have AMD.**



**Cataract** is a clouding of the lens of the eye that can be successfully treated by surgical 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.

**991,628 Ohioans age 40 and older have a cataract.**



**Diabetic Retinopathy (DR)** is a leading cause of blindness that occurs when diabetes damages blood vessels inside the retina. Patches of vision loss, cloudy vision, glare sensitivity and decreased night or low-light vision is associated with DR. The risks of DR are reduced through disease management and regular, professional eye exams.

**284,631 Ohioans age 40 and older have diabetic retinopathy.**



**Glaucoma** causes the loss of peripheral vision. Glaucoma is more common after age 40, among black and Hispanic populations, and in people with diabetes. It is often called the “sneak thief of sight” because it can slowly rob people of their vision.

**105,889 Ohioans age 40 and older have open-angle glaucoma.**

*Source: Vision Problems in Ohio, 2014*



**\$5.4 billion** is the estimated annual financial impact to the Ohio economy due to vision problems, refractive errors, visual impairment, and blindness.

## Policy and Program Recommendations

To further the overarching goal of decreasing vision loss among Ohio's aging population, the AEPPP developed the following recommendations:

1. Integrate adult vision messaging and strategies into existing efforts at the Ohio Department of Health (i.e. tobacco cessation, primary care and rural health, diabetes prevention and control, health promotion, falls prevention) and include both adult and child vision issues, including aging vision, in state and local health improvement planning.
2. Support measures that increase multidisciplinary evidence-based vision screening practices and facilitate mechanisms for follow-up care.
3. Support and advocate for coverage of comprehensive and corrective preventive eye/vision care services for adults in the state Medicaid budget.
4. Support and advocate for coverage of comprehensive and corrective preventive eye/vision care benefits for all Medicare recipients.
5. Establish adult vision screening as a covered service in the Medicare annual wellness visit.

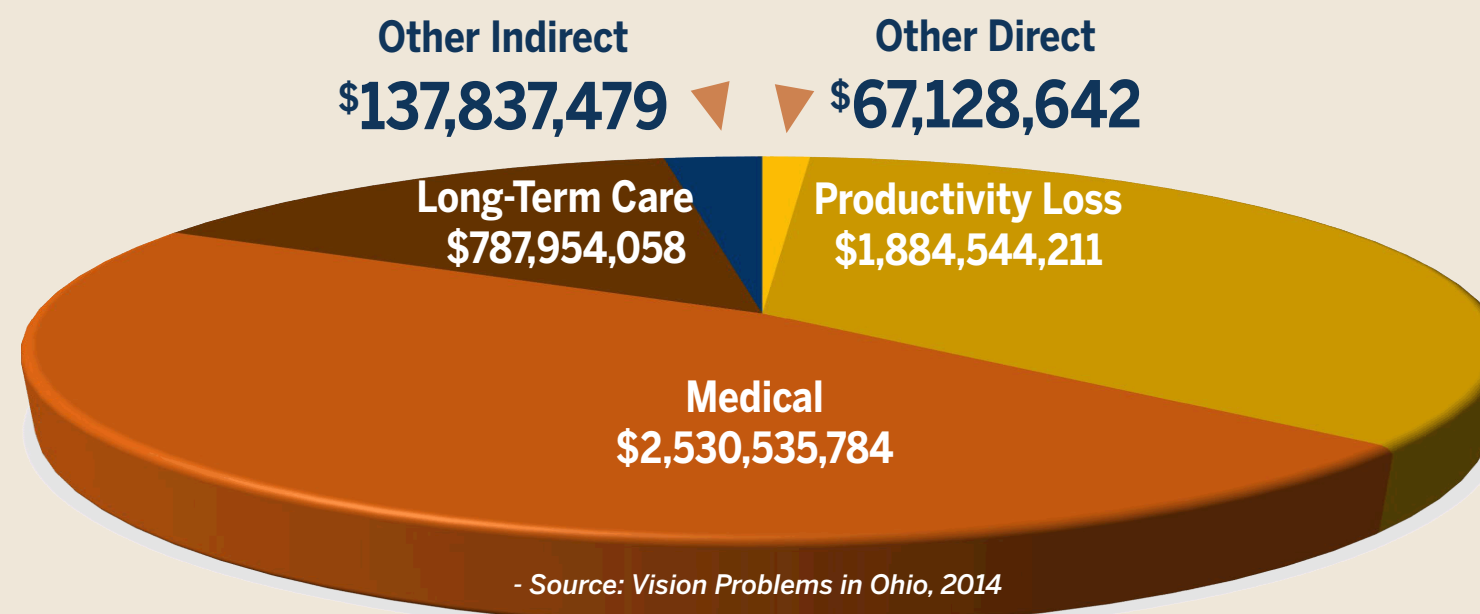
## Impact of Vision Problems in Ohio:

- Increased incidence of falls
- Increased rate of depression, social isolation, and poor health image
- Increased likelihood of nursing home admission
- Cognitive decline, particularly Alzheimer's disease



## Total Impact to the State of Ohio

**\$5,408,000,175**  
Financial Impact of Vision Loss



6. Support the continued expansion and development of comprehensive vision care services within Ohio's federally qualified health centers.
7. Support and advocate for inclusion of vision questions in Ohio and national data collection tools, such as the Ohio Medicaid Assessment Survey, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, and the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, to provide outcome data on which to base statewide public health vision programming.
8. Support and advocate for health insurance coverage for comprehensive vision care, vision education, and vision rehabilitation services.
9. Support the recommendations of Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities' Workforce Integration Task Force, which are aimed at removing barriers to employment for the deaf and blind communities, and all Ohio citizens, in reaching their highest employment potential.
10. Support vision related summits and other activities which supports awareness and encourages collaboration and expansion of research.
11. 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.

**3.6 million** Ohioans are estimated to have vision problems. As the population ages, this number will only increase.



# Age-Friendly Communities

## How communities can be more livable for people with vision impairments

For people with vision impairments, the first steps to a livable community are literally safe steps. Being able to securely navigate sidewalks, cross streets, and ride public transportation are keys to independence and mobility. Public spaces that take the varied needs of visitors into account empower and encourage people to get out and about.

"People with diminished or no vision and hearing aren't disabled as much as the built environment we have now is largely disabling," said Benjamin Frost, director of legal and public affairs at New Hampshire Housing and the executive producer of **Getting There**, the 2017 documentary that explores how "blind wayfinding" can serve as the standard that shapes public spaces.

### Tips for Improving the Environment for People with Visual Impairments:

- **Lighting** – Sidewalks and walking paths should be well lit.
- **Sidewalks** – Whether someone is vision-impaired, pushing a stroller or running, it is tough to weave through an obstacle course of trash cans and sidewalk debris.
- **Curb cuts** – Curb cuts should have visible or high-color contrast as well as noticeable texture changes.
- **Accessible pedestrian signals** – Pedestrian crosswalk signals that talk and vibrate take the guesswork out of crossing the street. Additionally, signals should provide an adequate period of time for individuals with vision loss (and others) to cross the street.



## Vision and Falls

Falling tops the list of major causes of eye injuries resulting in hospitalization over a 10-year period, according to research presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology in 2015. Clearly, falling and vision impairment go hand in hand. "Because people with vision impairments are more than twice as likely to fall as those without, keeping a regular schedule of eye examinations with an eye care professional can help avoid debilitating falls," according to Sherry Williams, president & CEO of the Ohio Affiliate of Prevent Blindness.



## Falls Prevention

The Steady U Ohio initiative provides information and resources to individuals, family members, businesses, communities, and more to prevent falls in all 88 Ohio counties. To learn more, visit [www.steady.ohio.gov](http://www.steady.ohio.gov).



### See your way to a steadier you!

- 1 – Have an annual eye exam.
- 2 – Wear corrective lenses as prescribed.
- 3 – Ask about alternatives to multi-focal lenses when active.
- 4 – Ask for tips to get used to new prescription lenses.
- 5 – Add lighting to dark areas of your home.
- 6 – Use the highest-wattage bulbs recommended for your light fixtures.
- 7 – Add contrasting colors on stairs and around bathroom fixtures.
- 8 – Wear a hat or sunglasses to control glare outdoors.



## Terry's Vision Story

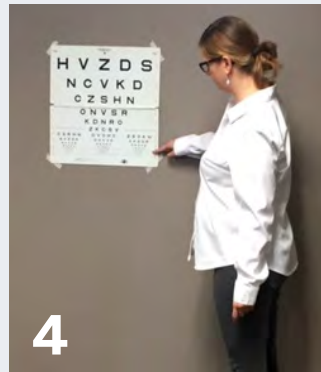
I want to thank everyone for this chance to be able to get an eye exam and glasses. Eyesight is one of the most precious gifts. Watching my mom deal with cataracts, and my sister with macular degeneration, I knew it was something I didn't want to go through. Upon my visit to the eye doctor, he discovered the beginning of a cataract in my left eye and somewhat elevated pressure in both eyes, which I understand can be an indicator of glaucoma. He did say, at this time, I had nothing to worry about, but would need to get it checked in a year. Things like reading and watching my grandkids graduating or even getting married might not be possible without my eyesight. I want to thank everyone involved in these programs and I hope they continue to help other people like me. Thanks to all of you. – **Terry R., Wood County**

## Aging Eye Summit: Our Bodies – Our Vision



The summit was held on June 6, 2019 at Northeast Ohio Medical University and focused on promoting understanding, early detection, and treatment of eye diseases related to diabetes and other disorders.

1. Ursel J. McElroy, director of the Ohio Department of Aging and co-chair of the AEPPP, welcomed the participants to the summit.

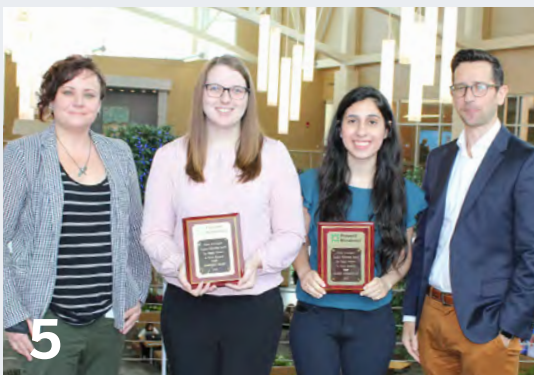


2. Keynote speaker Dr. Joseph Coney, president of the Ohio Ophthalmological Society.

3. Aging Eye Summit planning committee led by Dr. Samuel Crish.

4. Adult vision screening training.

5. Vision research fellowship advisors Dr. Christine Crish, left, and Dr. Matthew Smith (right), with fellowship recipients from Northeast Ohio Medical University (L to R) Gabrielle Frame and Naseem Amirmokhtari.



6. Fellowship recipient from Miami University, Phoung Lam (center), with her advisors Dr. Katia Del Rio-Tsonis (left) and Dr. Michael Robinson (right) at the Vision Research Scientific Forum.



## 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:

- Ohio Department of Aging
- Prevent Blindness, Ohio Affiliate
- Vision and Eye Health Initiative at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors

The Vision Research Fellowship Program is supported by a grant from the Ohio Department of Aging, Sarah E. Slack Prevention of Blindness Fund, Muskingum County Community Foundation, and the Vision Health Initiative.

## 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. "Cost of Vision Problems: The Economic Burden of Vision Loss and Eye Disorders in the United States." NORC at the University of Chicago;  
[www.visionproblemsus.org](http://www.visionproblemsus.org)
- Vision Problems in Ohio, Prevent Blindness Ohio (2014)
- American Academy of Ophthalmology AAO 2015, the 119th Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology

## Helpful Links

Ohio's Aging Eye Public Private Partnership  
[ohio.preventblindness.org/ohios-aging-eye-public-private-partnership](http://ohio.preventblindness.org/ohios-aging-eye-public-private-partnership)

Ohio Department of Aging  
[www.aging.ohio.gov](http://www.aging.ohio.gov)

Prevent Blindness, Ohio Affiliate  
[www.pb ohio.org](http://www.pb ohio.org)  
[ohiovisionproblems.preventblindness.org/map/](http://ohiovisionproblems.preventblindness.org/map/)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Vision Health Initiative  
[www.cdc.gov/visionhealth](http://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth)



## Ohio's Aging Eye Public/Private Partnership c/o Prevent Blindness, Ohio Affiliate

1500 West Third Avenue, Suite 200, Columbus, OH 43212

1-800-301-2020 (toll-free) ■ 1-614-464-2020 (office) ■ 1-614-481-9670 (fax)

[ohio.preventblindness.org/ohios-aging-eye-public-private-partnership](http://ohio.preventblindness.org/ohios-aging-eye-public-private-partnership)

## Leadership Ohio's Aging Eye Public Private Partnership

### Co-Chairs

**Rafat R. Ansari, PhD, Fellow SPIE**  
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### Advocacy and Awareness Co-Chairs

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Assistant Professor  
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The Ohio State University

### Member Organizations:

Health Services Advisory Group  
NASA John H. Glenn Research Center  
Ohio Association of  
Area Agencies on Aging  
Ohio Association of  
Gerontology and Education  
Blind and Visually Impaired  
Ohio Department of Aging  
Ohio Department of Health  
Ohio Department of Insurance/OSHIIP  
Ohio Ophthalmological Society  
Ohio Osteopathic Association  
Ohio Optometric Association  
Ohio Public Health Association  
Ohio Veterans Visual Impairment  
Services Team  
Opticians Association of Ohio  
Opportunities for Ohioans with  
Disabilities  
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*In memory of Peter Tamburro*