



## Ohio's Aging Eye Public Private Partnership

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

# Preserving Ohioans' Gift of Sight



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

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

The impact of vision loss on an individual, his or her family, and Ohio is a significant public and personal health concern that impacts the quality of life for Ohio's seniors now and will in the future. To that end *Ohio's Aging Eye Public Private Partnership* (AEPPP) is implementing a plan to address issues including:

- *Vision care and preservation*
- *Rehabilitation services*
- *Vision-related public health and policy*
- *Education and awareness*
- *Research*

That plan is available for your review as a part of this report. We hope you take a moment to review it.

Vision-related disability causes a substantial emotional, social and economic toll for millions of people including significant suffering, disability, loss of productivity, and diminished quality of life. An estimated 3.8 million Ohioans have vision problems and, as the population ages, this number will continue to increase. The estimated financial burden to the Ohio economy due to vision problems, refractive errors, visual impairment, and blindness is \$6.1 billion annually. (<https://ohio.preventblindness.org/vision-problems-in-ohio/>).

We encourage government leaders, public health professionals, health care providers, business and community leaders, and all Ohioans to work together to curtail the growth of vision problems in Ohio. We offer our resources and services to you and encourage you to *Preserve Ohioans' Gift of Sight*.

### **Highlights of the Work of the Aging Eye Partnership:**

- Offer evidence-based healthy aging programs that help participants learn strategies to preserve vision as well as manage vision loss, diabetes, depression, and the risk of falling.
- Conduct outreach about falls prevention and health promotion. Vision impairment increases the risk of falling by 50%. Many Partnership members serve on the Ohio Older Adult Falls Prevention Coalition.
- Provide training to assist people with visual impairments with daily living skills to improve their quality of life and to remain independent.
- Provide Adult Vision Screening and HealthyEyes advocate training. Participants are trained as vision health advocates and equipped to conduct adult vision screenings.
- Host an annual Aging Eye Summit. This year the Summit was held in conjunction with The Ohio State University Havener Eye Institute. Topics included: gene therapy for Inherited Retinal Disease, updates in treatment and new advances in surgery options for glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy, genetic counseling, management of dry macular degeneration, and an overview of low vision rehabilitation and resources.
- Collaborate on research projects. Currently, working with the National Kidney Foundation on the Chronic Kidney Disease and Diabetic Retinopathy Quality Improvement Project, communicating regularly with multiple FQHCs about vision resources and integrating vision into their practices. Also, partnering on a National Association of Chronic Disease Directors funded project to assess visual impairment (VI) and identified factors associated with VI in specific Ohio zip codes with high rates of self-reported VI and/or blindness.
- Provide Vision Research Fellowships. The Fellows present their innovative work at the Vision Research Scientific Forum annually.
- Hold Legislative Briefings and provide all Ohio legislators with a packet of eye health resources that are useful in assisting their



## 2024 Vision Research Fellowship Recipients

### Lauren Cruz (L) - Case Western Reserve University

Research aims to prevent avoidable vision loss from primary open angle glaucoma (POAG) in people of non-European ancestry through earlier risk detection by better understanding the epigenetic landscape underlying POAG, thereby decreasing the health disparity gap for African Americans. Glaucoma is a leading cause of irreversible blindness worldwide, and primary open-angle glaucoma (POAG) is the most prevalent type, accounting for 70% of cases.



### Priya Shukla (R) - The Cleveland Clinic

Researching the association of immune mediated inflammatory diseases, commonly known as autoimmune diseases, and age-related macular degeneration. Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a leading cause of vision loss worldwide. The current understanding of this disease is incomplete, but there is evidence that inflammation plays a key role. The results of this study may identify patients who would benefit from earlier and more frequent ophthalmic screening to prevent advancement of AMD and preserve vision.

## Ohio's Aging Eye Public Private Partnership Strategic Plan

### Vision-Related Public Health & Policy

- Integrate adult vision messaging and strategies into state and local health improvement planning.
- Advocate for coverage of comprehensive vision care and rehabilitation services for adults in Medicaid and Medicare programs.
- Advocate for the development and expansion of comprehensive vision care and rehabilitation services within community health centers, including federally qualified health centers.
- Advocate for affordable health insurance coverage of early disease detection, comprehensive vision care, and rehabilitation services.

#### Education & Awareness

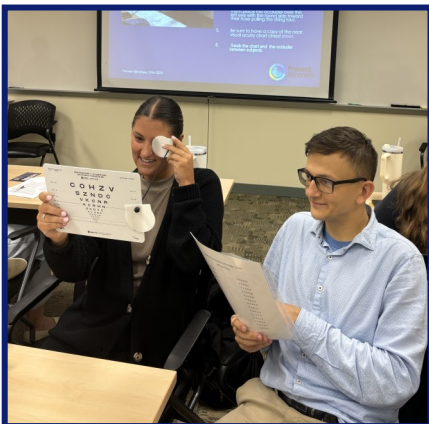
- Educate others about how they can provide access to vision care and rehabilitation services for their clients.
- Increase awareness about the growth of vision problems amongst Ohio's aging population.
- Support early detection and treatment efforts for chronic diseases that impact vision and eye health.

#### Research

- Support efforts that increase evidence-based vision screening practices as well as access to vision care and rehabilitation services.
- Promote best practices for seniors in maintaining healthy vision.
- Support efforts that eliminate health disparities in vision and rehabilitation services.

#### Vision Care, Preservation & Rehabilitation Services

- Support and advocate for inclusion of vision questions in Ohio and national data collection tools to provide outcome data on which to base statewide public health vision programming.
- Support vision-related activities that promote awareness, collaboration, and expansion of research.



## 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.

Statistics from the "2020 Vision Problems in Ohio" report indicate increases in the four leading causes of vision loss in Ohio since the 2014 report was issued.

- 97,870 people age 50 and older have age-related **macular degeneration** - a 10.5% increase
- 1,025,422 people age 40 and older have **cataract** - a 3.4% increase
- 294,742 people age 40 and older have **diabetes-related retinopathy** - a 3.5% increase
- 109,556 people age 40 and older have **glaucoma** - a 3.5% increase



Vision Problems in Ohio Data: <https://ohio.preventblindness.org/vision-problems-in-ohio/>

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## Ohio's Aging Eye Public Private Partnership Leadership

### Co-Chairs

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### Advocacy and Awareness Co-Chairs

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### Vision Research Chair

Andrew Hartwick, OD, PhD  
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### Member Organizations\*

Foundation Fighting Blindness  
Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging  
Ohio Association of Gerontology and Education  
Ohio Association of Senior Centers  
Ohio Agencies Serving the 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  
Prevent Blindness Ohio

*\*AEPPO membership also includes additional representatives from higher education, federally qualified health centers, vision research, and allied health professionals.*

View Prevent Blindness Ohio's  
Vision Resource Guide here:



View Prevent Blindness Ohio's  
Website here:

