



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 5, 2003

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MORE THAN 91,800 OHIOANS AGE 40+ HAVE GLAUCOMA Early Detection Crucial to Preventing Vision Loss

COLUMBUS – Nearly 92,000 Ohioans age 40 and older have glaucoma and half don't even know the disease is slowly robbing them of eyesight. Often glaucoma has no noticeable symptoms in its early stages. For instance, glaucoma is often called the 'sneak thief of sight' because it slowly robs people of their vision without them realizing it,

The number of people with glaucoma is expected to double over the next 30 years as the Baby Boomer generation ages. More than 2.5 million Ohioans will be affected by glaucoma and other potentially blinding eye diseases. During National Glaucoma Awareness Month in January, Prevent Blindness Ohio urges people age 40 and older to learn about the disease and undergo proper testing.

"The challenge is to get people to visit their eye doctor regularly, especially if they are at risk for the disease, because early detection is crucial," said Sherill K. Williams, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness Ohio. In the early stages, glaucoma has no symptoms – no noticeable vision loss and no pain. By the time symptoms start to appear, some permanent damage to the eye has usually occurred.

When you have glaucoma, a fluid called aqueous humor doesn't drain correctly through channels in the front of the eye. The fluid build-up leads to increased intraocular pressure, which damages the optic nerve. Untreated, glaucoma can permanently damage the optic nerve, leading to reduced vision or even blindness. While there is no cure, glaucoma is usually a treatable condition, if diagnosed early.

Risk factors for glaucoma include:

- **Age:** Those ages 40 and older are more likely to develop glaucoma. The older you are, the greater your risk.
- **Race:** People of African or Afro-Caribbean heritage have glaucoma four to five times more often than the rest of the population. They are also likely to develop glaucoma at a younger age.

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- **Family History:** If you have a parent or sibling who has glaucoma, you are more likely to develop the disease.
- **Diabetes:** People with diabetes have a higher risk of developing glaucoma.
- **Nearsightedness:** People who are very nearsighted are at greater risk.
- **Eye Injury or Surgery:** Those who have had eye surgery or eye injuries may develop secondary glaucoma.
- **Steroid Medication:** Steroids may increase the risk of glaucoma when used for extended periods of time.

Medicare pays for glaucoma detection exams in recipients age 60 and older and at high risk, or those with a family history of the disease (effective Jan. 1, 2002). Prevent Blindness Ohio offers a free flyer describing this benefit, *Glaucoma Medicare Benefit*, as well as other glaucoma brochures and fact sheets to anyone who calls Prevent Blindness Ohio at 800-301-2020.

Prevent Blindness Ohio, founded in 1957, is the only voluntary, not-for-profit health organization dedicated to preventing blindness and preserving sight. It serves all 88 Ohio counties, providing direct services to more than 300,000 Ohioans annually and educating millions of consumers about what they can do to protect and preserve their precious gift of sight. Prevent Blindness Ohio is an affiliate of Prevent Blindness America, the country's second-oldest national voluntary health organization. Visit our website at www.preventblindness.org/ohio or call 800-301-2020 for more information.