



SAVE SENIORS FROM VISION LOSS

A Senior Eye Health Initiative of Prevent Blindness Ohio

Program Background and Overview

Introduction

It is no secret that issues concerning the aging baby-boomer generation and their parents occupy more space on both political and media agendas of late. Each year, more and more baby-boomers are crossing the age 50 mark towards grandparenting, caring for aging parents, and eventual retirement. A prime requirement for health and good living is good vision.

Growth in Vision Problems Among Aging Americans Is Staggering!

Today, there are 1,259,000 older Ohioans affected by vision problems that if not detected and treated early, could lead to blindness. Because of the growth in the aging population, there will be more than 2.5 million Ohioans affected by vision-robbing conditions by the Year 2030, largely resulting from the eye diseases of diabetic retinopathy, cataract, glaucoma, and age-related macular degeneration (AMD). The burden on our health care system, social/rehabilitative service programs, and quality of life will be staggering. **More than 2.5 million Ohioans will be affected.**

The Fourth Edition of *Vision Problems in the U.S.*, the only comprehensive listing on the prevalence of major eye diseases affecting America's adult population was released in March 2002 by PREVENT BLINDNESS AMERICA and the National Institutes of Health (National Eye Institute). *Vision Problems in the U.S.* underscores that vision problems are a growing concern for the nation's aging population. The new report addresses the current leading causes of vision impairment and blindness in the U.S. on a state-by-state basis. In Ohio, the prevalence numbers are significant and include:

- **AMD** is the most common cause of blindness and vision impairment in Americans age 60 and older. More than **71,000** Ohioans age 60 and older have late-stage AMD, while hundreds of thousands more suffer from some form of the disease.
- **Diabetic retinopathy** affects more than **216,000** Ohioans age 18 and older.
- **Cataract** affects nearly **880,000** Ohioans age 65 and older.
- **Glaucoma** is a chronic disease that often requires life-long treatment to control. Approximately **92,000** Ohioans have glaucoma—and half don't even know the disease is slowly robbing them of sight.

The challenge of addressing Ohio's aging eye problem is substantial and Prevent Blindness Ohio would like to be prepared to attack the problems on many fronts to make the most meaningful impact for Ohio seniors through Awareness-Raising, Eye Health Education for Seniors and Senior Eye Health Screening.

Eye Health Screening:

Half of blindness and vision loss in seniors is preventable. So screening for possible eye problems makes good sense. Prevention is an important aspect of health care. Many organizations, service groups and clubs participate in adult vision screening training so that they can provide vision screening services to their communities.

Through this project, Prevent Blindness Ohio will train and equip providers of primary health care, community volunteers and senior center staff to provide vision screenings to the senior populations that they serve. We believe that when we provide vision screening training/equipment to individuals, we are providing a great level of independence to the trainee to serve their senior population, in their own community or organization, without being dependent upon Prevent Blindness Ohio's staff/volunteer scheduling to provide this needed direct service.

Vision screening is a good beginning to eye care. A screening does not replace a professional eye examination, but it can help identify individuals at risk for eye disease. Finding eye disease in its early, treatable stages saves sight.

While vision screening is not an exam, it is a great responsibility. Prevent Blindness Ohio believes that screeners need to be effective, consistent and of the highest quality. Through specially developed courses, Prevent Blindness America equips people to learn skills, practice them under the eyes of experienced observers, and earn valuable accreditation.

Prevent Blindness adult vision screenings consist of a number of steps. First, a screener will assess the participants' risk of several leading eye problems by asking questions about medical history, age, race and how recently they've seen an eye doctor.

The screening tests will check for refractive problems such as:

- Nearsightedness or the inability to focus at a distance;
- Farsightedness or the inability to focus at close ranges; and
- "Aging eye" or a decrease in the ability to focus on things close up.

Also, a visual field test is used to help detect significant changes in peripheral (side) vision. Such changes can be early signs of glaucoma.

Lastly, a screener discusses the test results with each participant and makes a recommendation regarding the need for professional eye care.

Prevent Blindness' 6.5-hour training course utilizes the latest adult vision screening tools. The comprehensive manual provides participant information including reasons for

screening, equipment and set-up lists, detailed instructions for conducting tests, activities, reference material and a glossary. Participants learn about:

- Risks for certain eye diseases;
- Distance acuity tests;
- Near acuity tests;
- Visual field tests;
- Exit interviews to interpret results for the screened individual, make recommendations to see an eye doctor, provide information, answer questions and initiate follow-up; and
- Appropriate screening reports.

The course emphasizes the importance of regular eye examinations, subject evaluation and effective follow-up. Upon completion of the Screener Basics Course, participants are candidates for certification. Certification is available to course participants who successfully demonstrate their knowledge of skills at an observed screening.

Senior Eye Health Care Education:

As of January 1, 2002, the Medicare fee-for-service program now covers an annual glaucoma screening for those determined to be at highest risk for the disease. Eligible individuals include African Americans, people with diabetes mellitus or a family history of glaucoma. The screening covered by Medicare will include a dilated eye examination with an intraocular pressure (IOP) measurement and a direct ophthalmoscopy examination, or slit-lamp biomicroscopic examination.

This new extended Medicare coverage is a result of the Beneficiary Improvements and Protections Act (BIPA) enacted by Congress in December 2000. The legislation called for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), formerly known as the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), to phase in specific coverage for certain tests and therapies that can detect diseases early, when they are most easily treated or cured.

In the past, Medicare paid for routine testing for glaucoma only after a patient was identified as having symptoms of the disease. But, early detection and treatment made before there are noticeable symptoms can be critical to maintaining vision. What's more, early identification and treatment will lead to a huge cost savings in treatment of the disease.

Glaucoma is a chronic disease that often requires life-long treatment to control. Approximately **92,000** Ohioans have glaucoma—and half (46,000) don't even know the disease is slowly robbing them of sight. The number of Ohioans with glaucoma will double by the Year 2030 and affect 184,000 Ohioans.

This educational effort will also benefit the over 700,000 Ohioans with diabetes and the 215,000 of these individuals with diabetic retinopathy, a complex eye disease that if left untreated can

cause partial or complete blindness. Educating diabetics who are at high risk for debilitating eye diseases, such as diabetic retinopathy, about the importance of compliance and regular health care by specialized physicians, such as eye doctors, is at the heart of our organization's mission. Diabetics are twice as likely to develop other blinding eye diseases such as cataracts and glaucoma.

A vast majority of seniors are not aware that there are no signs or symptoms of glaucoma or diabetic retinopathy and that a professional eye exam is the only way to detect this sight-robbing disease. Seniors, as well as their primary health care providers, are also not aware of this new Medicare benefit that not only could save their sight, but ultimately save costs for the treatment of these chronic diseases.

PREVENT BLINDNESS OHIO, founded in 1957, is the only voluntary, not-for-profit Ohio organization dedicated to preventing blindness and preserving sight. It serves all 88 Ohio counties, providing direct services to more than 70,000 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.

**PREVENT BLINDNESS OHIO/1500 W. Third Avenue, Suite 200/Columbus, OH 43212
614-464-2020/Fax: 614-481-9670/Email: preventblindnessohio@compuserve.com**