



Task Force for Preserving Adult Vision
Final Report
Senator Jeffry Armbruster, Chairman
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BACKGROUND

History: The Task Force for Preserving Adult Vision was established as a result of Senate Concurrent Resolution 33. It was designed to examine the current delivery system of vision care services to Ohio's adult and aging population and to recommend best practices to be used in the identification and prevention of ocular diseases.

Members: Senator Jeffry Armbruster serves as chairman of the Task Force for Preserving Adult Vision. Other members from the Senate include Senators Ray Miller and Robert Spada. Members from the House of Representatives include Representatives Courtney Combs, Lorraine Fende, and Geoffrey Smith.

Purpose: The Task Force purpose was to analyze the status of current vision services available to Ohio's adult and aging population. The Task Force will report to the governor and the leadership of the General Assembly any recommendations as to how the state can advance in the identification and prevention of aging-related ocular diseases.

Process: The Task Force convened two formal meetings and received opinions, documentation, and testimony from 4 state agencies and 5 vision and health organizations. The Task Force also convened during a roundtable discussion with the 9 interested parties to review other states programs and determine the best method of presenting and organizing the information and recommendations heard in received testimonies.

STATE PROGRAMS

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES

Existing vision services are covered under *Ohio Medicaid*

Provides eye exams:

- Every 2 years for those 21-59 years old
- Every year for those younger than 21 or older than 60

Provides eye glasses:

- One pair every 2 years for those 21-59 years old
- One pair every year for those younger than 21 or older than 60

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

- ODH receives federal funding for its *Ohio Diabetes Prevention and Control Program*
 - Focus towards prevention of diabetic retinopathy
- Works with the Aging Eye Public Private Partnership
- Distributes eye disease awareness information
- Sends eye specialists to the Statewide Diabetes Conference
- Administers with Save Our Sight (SOS) Program for early identification of children with vision problems

OHIO REHABILITATION SERVICES COMMISSION

Independent Living Program for Older Individuals with Vision Loss

- Works with those age 55+ with vision loss uncorrectable by medical surgery or treatment to allow them to live independently, teaches skills to adapt to vision loss
- Does not use State GRF funds, funded by federal funds, Social Security, and grantee partners
- On average \$687.89 is spent per impaired person

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF AGING

- One of the 12 Area Agencies on Aging operates a direct service program for the blind (AAA in Lima)
- Supports the Office of Aging Vision and the Aging Eye Public Private Partnership

OHIO OPHTHALMOLOGICAL SOCIETY (OOS)

- Direct services (medical treatments, surgery)
- Work with pharmaceutical manufacturers and equipment designers to create and test new therapies
- Donate time/funds to charitable causes benefiting vision problems
- Eye Care America: provides eye exams and follow up services at no charge to qualifying seniors with specific focus on those with glaucoma and diabetes, partners with Meals on Wheels and Area Agencies on Aging
 - Seniors EyeCare Program: eye exams and one year of treatment for those without eye care insurance aged 65+

- Diabetes EyeCare Program: same as SEP but for those with diabetes
- Glaucoma EyeCare Program: same but for those at risk of glaucoma

OHIO OPTOMETRIC ASSOCIATION

- Trade association, political action committee and charitable foundation representing Ohio based optometrists.
- *Vision USA* is a year-round program that assists working Ohioans and their families who cannot afford the cost of ordinary eye care or eye insurance by providing comprehensive eye exams at no extra cost.
- *Realeyes Classroom Initiative*, member optometrists visit schools to teach the importance of lifetime comprehensive eye care and safety.

OPTICIANS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO

- Trade association and political action committee representing Ohio based opticians.
- Operates a program to help stop the dispensing of illegal cosmetic contacts.

PREVENT BLINDNESS OHIO

- Vision screening training, eye care for medically indigent, educational programs, supports scientific research
- Funding from voluntary contributions, no government funding or United Way funding
- Ohio has 110 FQHC (Neighborhood Health Centers) sites and only 3 provide access to professional vision care

VISION CENTER OF CENTRAL OHIO

- Ohio has several large rehab facilities providing direct services through vision centers in Toledo, Cleveland, Dayton, Cincinnati, Columbus, Lima, and Lancaster
- Personal adjustment services (help with tasks of daily living, communications, etc) with big emphasis on helping the individual return to work/ be retrained for work
- RSC is federally funded for its Independent Living Program: rehabilitation teachers meet with clients in their homes, work with them on using optical aids to max use of residual vision; Orientation & Mobility training where instructor teaches client to walk in neighborhoods, go to store, public transportation, etc.

OTHER STATE PROGRAMS

ILLINOIS

- Illinois Department of Public Aid provides comprehensive medical benefits, but vision services are not listed.
- Bureau of Blind Services is designed to help adults with visual impairments participate fully in family and community life and to enable them to work. There are several teaching programs that help adults with workplace and home skills, as well as help in obtaining technology to assist them in the workplace.
- Aid to the Aged, Blind, and Disabled program. Open to those on SSI, U.S. citizens, or non-citizens meeting certain requirements, live in Illinois, 65 yrs. old or older, and blind or disabled. They are eligible for cash and medical assistance, and potentially for food stamps.
- The Guild for the Blind provides aid to those who are blind or visually impaired to help them achieve dignity and independence. They also provide Computer Training services, Adult Rehab services, Employment services and Information and Referral services.
- The Illinois Eye Institute provides free vision screenings, helps provide eye care for the Special and Junior Olympics, and works in the Chinatown neighborhood and helps provide services to the Illinois School for the visually impaired.
- The Illinois Society for the Prevention of Blindness works on education, eye safety, information and research, they receive no government funding. They also provide grants of up to \$5,000 for studies related to the prevention of blindness.

INDIANA

- The Indiana Medicaid program covers Families with Children, Pregnant Women and Children, the Aged, and the Blind and Disabled that financially qualify and provides coverage for Optometry services and for eyeglasses.
- Medicaid Select is the health care program for the Aged, Blind and Disabled. They do not require a referral from the primary care physician for eye care, though they do for eye surgery. It is the same as it is under the Hoosier Healthwise program.
- Hoosier Healthwise is Indiana's health care program for children, pregnant women, and low-income working families and requires a primary physician who then refers patients for many services.
- Prevent Blindness Indiana provides free vision screenings to find those at high risk for eye disorders or potentially blinding diseases. They also provide some free comprehensive eye exams and glasses.

MICHIGAN

- Medicaid in Michigan is responsible for covering medically necessary services in regard to vision care. Every enrollee joins a health care plan through which the services are provided. The health care providers help enrollees know exactly what they are eligible for.

- The Michigan Commission for the Blind assists in Vocational Rehabilitation Services to help the legally blind securing gainful employment. They also operate a training center to provide training to the legally blind. They also operate several other programs designed to help the legally blind in living and working independently.

WISCONSIN

- Medicare covers medically necessary optometric or optical services, including eyeglasses.
- Medicare is open to those 65 and older, and the Blind.
- Prevent Blindness Wisconsin offers free glaucoma screenings at Community Centers, Senior Living Facilities, Health Fairs, Food Pantries, Churches, and Corporations.

PENNSYLVANIA

- The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) runs the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services that assists the blind and visually impaired gain skills necessary to live and work independently.
 - Prevention of blindness program includes pre-school and adult vision screening, eye safety programs, public education programs, referral for services/follow up, and data collection.
 - Programming includes help for older, blind adults that desire to live independently, mobility programs, specialized children's & adult programs.

**NOTE: This list is not all-inclusive, and not meant to be used as a reference.*

CONCLUSIONS

As a prelude to this final section, the members appointed to this Taskforce would like to thank the groups and state agencies for their willingness to work with us and help us understand the landscape in Ohio when it comes to the aging eye. While all groups are doing a fine job, there is always room for improvement. That is precisely the purpose of this section, to set out what, in our collective opinion, can be improved upon.

1) Coordination of State resources and programs

As many groups mentioned, it would be best to establish a central Office of Vision Services. This newly created office would serve all levels of vision health and provide all types of vision services. This committee would also like the interested parties to look into the practicality of this new office serving all adults. While the four state agencies each serve a critical role in Ohio's eye health, one centralized office would be a more streamlined and efficient use of state resources. Such an office would fit in best at the Ohio Department of Health. The new office's principal role would be advocacy for eye and vision health to include such considerations as follow:

- Coordinate educational activities and develop educational materials and provide information to the public.
- Increase access to vision services for all Ohio consumers including analysis of rules and laws governing eye care.
- Act as an informational resource for state agencies, professional boards and legislative offices as they review and analyze public policy that impacts the vision and eye health of Ohio's citizens in the ever-evolving health care marketplace.
- Establish an adult-oriented, volunteer-funded program similar to the Save our Sight program.
- Provide orientation and training to local groups that deal with Ohioans at risk for eye diseases and injury.
- Conduct public health surveillance of the impact and scope of vision loss in adult Ohioans.

2) Comprehensive Eye Exams

While vision screenings, like the ones conducted at the BMV and health fairs are certainly valuable, there is no substitute for a comprehensive eye exam. More needs to be done to encourage people to get full eye exams, by way of private sector and government incentives, such as:

- Provide discounts on renewals of vehicle registrations or drivers license by seniors that submit proof of a comprehensive eye exam at the time of renewal.
- Encourage automobile insurance companies to provide a discount if their policyholders submit proof of routine eye exams.
 - It is worth noting that we expect safer roads and lower insurance costs as a side effect of more people investing in their eye health.
- Provide incentives to businesses that encourage and enable their employees to get comprehensive eye exams routinely through the inclusion of comprehensive eye exam coverage as part of an employee's offered health care benefit.

3) Early Detection and Treatment

To stabilize and eventually decrease health care costs, early detection and treatment is a must. The theory that early detection and treatment equals health care cost savings has been proven in all facets of the health care industry. With vision, we must also remember that vision cannot be replaced once lost. Investment through resources and services up front will save cost and quality of live for all Ohioans. The taskforce recommends the following to help Ohio achieve this wise investment in quality and cost savings in relation to vision:

- Encourage Medicaid to continue to cover preventative eye care.
- Adopt legislation that will require health insurance companies to include coverage for diabetes supplies and education as part of their basic health care plans.

This list of recommendations is by no means final or all-inclusive. This is simply what the members of the Taskforce believe would lead us in the right direction toward improving Ohio's overall eye health. We look forward to working with all participants again and applaud them for all the hard work that lead to this report.

Respectfully Submitted,

Senator Jeffrey Armbruster
Chairman Task Force for Preserving Adult Vision