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**PREVENT BLINDNESS OHIO CELEBRATES VISION RESEARCH
MONTH BY AWARDING THREE VISION RESEARCH GRANTS**
*VISION RESEARCH KEY TO PREVENTING
DEVASTATING EFFECTS OF VISION LOSS*

COLUMBUS – With the increasing number of aging baby boomers and the continuing struggle for families to find affordable health care, the number of blind and visually impaired is expected to double by the year 2030. In addition to the emotional impact of vision loss and its effects on quality of life is the financial toll it takes on our country.

According to a recent study funded by Prevent Blindness Ohio, Prevent Blindness America and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the costs to the individual and their caregivers are staggering. The annual impact on the U.S. and Ohio economy of vision conditions is a staggering \$51.4 billion and \$2.3 billion respectively. The “*Economic Impact of Vision Problems: The Toll of Major Adult Eye Disorders, Visual Impairment, and Blindness on the U.S. Economy*” study focused on age-related macular degeneration (AMD), cataract, diabetic retinopathy, primary open-angle glaucoma, refractive error, visual impairment and blindness.

"These astounding numbers underscore the significant need to address the overall impact of vision problems on individuals, their families and our society. Families are paying a lot in costs associated with eye diseases such as age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, cataracts, and diabetic retinopathy. And the cost is not only financial. What's often not talked about is the bigger toll that vision loss takes on families. Many people and their loved ones feel at a loss following a vision loss diagnosis," said Sherry Williams, President & CEO of Prevent Blindness Ohio.

Because vision research is a key component in addressing the growth of vision loss, Prevent Blindness Ohio, along with Prevent Blindness America, has named June as Vision Research Awareness Month. Its mission is to advocate for support for vision research and assist in providing researchers with the resources they need to help find the causes of and cures for blindness eye diseases.

Prevent Blindness Ohio is celebrating Vision Research Month by awarding fellowship grants to three student fellows through its **Young Investigators Student Fellowship Award for Female Scholars in Vision Research**. This program encourages female scientists at the beginning of their careers to pursue vision research that can contribute toward the early detection and treatment discoveries that will be needed to curb the growth of vision loss in Ohio

Prevent Blindness Ohio is pleased to announce the three fellowship grant recipients for 2007:

Loretta Szczotka-Flynn from Case Western Reserve University's Department of Ophthalmology, Epidemiology and Biostatistics, is studying contact lens safety issues for individuals wearing extended wear contact lenses. Infections caused by improper use of contact lenses can lead to damage of the cornea, the thin layer of tissue in the front of the eye.

Meera Shukla from Case Western Reserve University's School of Medicine is studying the retina and the effects of different drugs on treating retinitis pigmentosa. Roughly 400,000 Americans and 18,000 Ohioans have the disease which can cause serious vision loss.

Kristin Oblad from The Ohio State University College of Optometry is working to develop a new contact lens solution that will improve the comfort of contact lens wear, especially for those affected by dry eye. As many as 12 million Americans have moderate to severe dry eyes and this number is likely to increase with the aging population resulting in a significant decrease in the quality of life.

Fellowship research projects will commence this summer and conclude by September 30, 2007. Fellows will present the results of their projects at a research forum sponsored by Prevent Blindness Ohio and Ohio's Aging Eye Public Private Partnership this fall. The Award Program is financially assisted by the Charlotte R. Schmidlapp Fund, Fifth Third Bank, Trustee.

For more information on the Prevent Blindness Ohio Fellowship Award, or for free brochures on vision research and various eye diseases, call Prevent Blindness Ohio at 1-800-301-2020 or visit www.pbohio.org.

Prevent Blindness Ohio is celebrating 50 years as Ohio's leading volunteer nonprofit public health organization dedicated to preventing blindness and preserving sight. Founded in 1957 by U.S. Senator John Bricker and Lion's Club Member, Bob Morrison with support from Nationwide, the Ohio Department of Health and Delta Gamma Fraternity, PBO serves all 88 Ohio counties. We provide direct services to more than 800,000 Ohioans annually and educate 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. For more information or to make a contribution, visit our website at www.pbohio.org or call 800-301-2020.