



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**For more information:
Andrea Albanese Denning
614-464-2020 ext. 119**

71,000 OLDER OHIOANS HAVE AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION

Prevent Blindness Ohio doubles efforts to curb growth of vision loss due to AMD

COLUMBUS, OH – Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD) is a serious eye disease that affects the vision of more than 1.5 million Americans and 71,000 Ohioans. And, it’s the leading cause of visual impairment among those ages 50 and older. AMD robs people of their central vision and often the ability to read a book, recognize a face, drive an automobile, see fine details, or distinguish some colors, which greatly limits personal independence.

The most frightening aspect of the disease is that it progresses painlessly, with many patients not aware they are developing a problem. AMD patients slowly begin to lose their central vision which can eventually lead to permanent vision loss. Unfortunately, once symptoms begin to appear, vision loss has already occurred. And, if left untreated, studies show that those diagnosed with “wet” AMD (a more rapidly progressing condition than “dry” AMD) may become functionally blind within two years.

In a recent report issued in the *Archives of Ophthalmology*, researchers found that as a nation, Americans spend \$35.4 billion related to visual disorders, including medical expenses and loss of productivity. Of that number, \$575 million was directly attributed to AMD costs. Alarmingly, because of the extremely large aging population, the number of AMD cases is estimated to balloon in the very near future, potentially creating a devastating financial impact.

But AMD doesn’t just take its toll on the eyes. It also has proven to be not only a financial burden, but can affect the patient’s mental health as well. A study from AMD Alliance International concluded that AMD patients suffer higher rates of depression and report a profoundly negative impact on their quality of life. Patients who lose their ability to drive, read a newspaper or even see the faces of their loved ones begin to feel a significant loss of independence which can lead to emotional distress and often depression.

Ben Putnam of Marietta, Ohio, who has “wet” AMD, says his vision loss has drastically changed his way of life. “Since January 2005, I have not been able to drive or read the written word. I no

longer can visually recognize people, watch TV or work on my computer without assistance,” he says. When asked what is the best advice to give to someone regarding the health of their eyes, Putnam says, “Have regular check ups. Don’t wait, Preventive medicine is best.”

In conjunction with February as Age-related Macular Degeneration Awareness Month, Prevent Blindness Ohio is strengthening its efforts to curb the growth of vision loss due to AMD:

- Prevent Blindness Ohio and Prevent Blindness America have launched a new, dedicated online resource for patients and their loved ones to learn more about the disease. The Web site, www.preventblindness.org/amd, offers a variety of tools and information on everything from risk factors, treatment options, and resources on AMD training and screenings.
- On Wednesday, May 2, 2007 Prevent Blindness Ohio is partnering with Ohio’s Aging Eye Public Private Partnership, and Cole Eye Institute-Cleveland Clinic Foundation to host a day-long conference – ***The Aging Eye Summit Series: Focus on Age-Related Macular Degeneration*** at the Cole Eye Institute. This Summit will raise awareness among key stakeholders and decision-makers about the scope and impact of age-related macular degeneration in Ohio and develop collaborations to meet the increased demands for medical, public health, social service, long-term care and government services to support the 71,000 Ohioans now affected by AMD and the nearly 150,000 Ohioans who will be affected by AMD by the Year 2030. Seating is limited to the first 150 registrants. Registration, including continental breakfast and lunch, are complimentary. For more information contact Prevent Blindness Ohio at 1-800-301-2020.

The exact cause of AMD is unknown, but risk factors for the disease include age, being Caucasian, diets high in fat content, and smoking. Although the disease can affect younger people, it is much more common among older adults. Only a doctor can make a diagnosis, but the following are possible signs of AMD:

- Straight lines such as telephone poles, the sides of buildings or streetlight poles, look wavy.
- Written text and/or type can appear blurry.
- A dark or empty spot may block the center of your vision.

For free information on AMD visit Prevent Blindness Ohio at www.pbohio.org or call 1-800-301-2020.

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.

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AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION PSA

:30 PSA

DID YOU KNOW THAT AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION, OR AMD, AND IS THE LEADING CAUSE OF VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AMONG THOSE AGES 50 AND OLDER? ARE YOU AT RISK? ONLY AN EYE DOCTOR CAN TELL YOU FOR CERTAIN. GET REGULAR, PROFESSIONAL EYE EXAMS TO ENSURE A LIFETIME OF HEALTHY VISION. FOR FREE INFORMATION ON AMD RISK FACTORS AND TREATMENT OPTIONS, PLEASE CALL **Prevent Blindness Ohio** AT 800-301-2020 OR VISIT **www.pbohio.org**.

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AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION (AMD) TALKING POINTS

- About 1.65 million Americans age 50 and older and 71,000 Ohioans have advanced, vision-threatening cases of AMD. (Vision Problems in the U.S., March 2002.)
- AMD is the leading cause of blindness in the Western world in people 50 and older and third-most common cause around the world. If left untreated, the majority of eyes affected with wet AMD will become functionally blind within two years. (AMD Alliance International.)
- AMD may account for up to 30 percent of all bilateral blindness among Caucasian Americans. Blindness due to macular degeneration is extremely rare in African Americans, for reasons not well understood.

- AMD is characterized by loss of central vision, usually in both eyes. The person may experience a dark or empty spot in the center of their vision, distorted, wavy vertical lines or blurry text.
- There are two forms of AMD – “wet” (exudative) and “dry.” The dry form is much more common, but the wet form is responsible for the vast majority of severe vision loss caused by the disease.
- In the wet form, tiny blood vessels begin to grow rapidly beneath the retina, often breaking and leaking blood and fluid. Wet AMD, although more devastating can often be effectively controlled through laser treatment, such as photodynamic therapy and photocoagulation. Laser treatment is not effective for dry AMD.
- An estimated 500,000 new cases of wet AMD are diagnosed annually.
- People with AMD are more likely to be depressed than the general population. (AMD Alliance International.)
- The estimated annual total financial burden of major adult visual disorders is \$35.4 billion including direct medical costs, loss of productivity and other direct costs. AMD accounted for \$575 million in direct medical costs alone. (“The Economic Burden of Major Adult Visual Disorders in the United States,” David B. Rein, PhD, Paul P. Lee, PhD, et al.)
- Smokers are up to four times more likely than nonsmokers to develop AMD according to a report in the British Journal of Medicine from the public health experts at the University of Manchester. Smoking is known to impede the effects of antioxidants and to reduce the macular pigment density. Oxidants can damage the retina.
- A study by the National Eye Institute (NEI) offers some hope for people with moderate and advanced stages of AMD. The study suggests that pharmacological-level doses of zinc, vitamins C and E, and beta-carotene reduce the risk of progression of moderate and advanced cases of AMD. While these supplements may slow the progression of the disease, they are not a cure. It is important to check with your physician before taking these supplements.
- Diets high in fatty, processed baked goods can worsen the condition. Conversely, research suggests that diets rich in certain antioxidants, including lutein and zeaxanthin can help protect your eyes against AMD. Eating dark green leafy vegetables such as spinach may help slow the progression.

- Low-vision rehabilitation can help people with AMD make the most of their remaining sight. Low vision aids such as magnifying glasses, closed circuit televisions and large-screen computers can help people maintain the lifestyles they are accustomed to.