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LEADING CAUSE OF VISION LOSS IN AMERICA CAN BE CORRECTED WITH APPROPRIATE EYE CARE

Many May Not Be Aware of Cataract Services Available to Them

Columbus, OH – Despite the fact that cataract surgery has a 95 percent success rate, cataract is still the leading cause of blindness in the world. It is the leading cause of low vision in the United States, contributing to half of all cases. Americans spend \$6.8 billion every year on direct medical costs for outpatient, inpatient and prescription drug services for cataract, according to the 2007 “Economic Impact of Vision Problems: The Toll of Major Adult Eye Disorders, Visual Impairment, and Blindness on the U.S. Economy” study funded by Prevent Blindness Ohio and Prevent Blindness America.

More than 20.5 million Americans and 879,000 Ohioans ages 40 and older, are affected by cataracts, the clouding of the eye’s lens which blocks light needed for sight. And by the year 2020, it is estimated that more than 30.1 million Americans and 1.8 million Ohioans will have cataracts.

Cataract, which develops slowly and painlessly, is a clouding of the eye’s lens which blocks light needed for sight. With age, old cells in the lens build up and block light as it tries to pass through. The end result is cloudy or foggy vision. According to EyeCare America, more than half of those ages 65 and over have some degree of cataract.

There are currently 1.5 million Ohioans enrolled in Medicare, but 47% of Ohioans aged 65+ are not aware of the vision benefits they are eligible for according to the 2005 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey conducted by the Ohio Department of Health. In relation to cataract surgery coverage, because of changes in Medicare policy in 2005, cataract patients now have a choice of receiving either basic lens replacement, paid in full by Medicare up to \$2,000, or applying the credit to new replacement lenses that can correct farsightedness in addition to cataract removal. Prevent Blindness Ohio has created a free fact sheet entitled “Medicare Benefits and Your Eyes” to help explain these and other vision-related Medicare benefits. The group can also provide help in referring patients to public assistance programs.

Prevent Blindness Ohio has dedicated August as Cataract Awareness Month to educate the public on the condition and how to get treatment for it.

Ohio resident, Sharon Custer, an active golfer and president of a Credit Union, went to her ophthalmologist for a regular eye exam three years ago and was told that she was starting to develop a cataract. “There I was, a healthy, active 52-year old woman who was in the prime of her life. So when my ophthalmologist told me I was starting to

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Prevent Blindness Ohio Offers Free Cataract and Cataract Surgery Information

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develop a cataract, I was floored. To me, the thought of cataracts was nearly impossible ... wasn't that an older person's problem? I have worn glasses since I was a teenager and have always valued my vision", Sharon said. Cataracts were affecting her lifestyle. "I was having trouble driving at night and I just couldn't follow the golf ball anymore, both of which were frustrating!" Sharon had procedures done to both eyes and today, due to the implants, has to wear glasses only for driving.

"At some point, most of us will develop cataract, so we need to be educated now on where we can turn for help," said Sherry Williams, President and CEO of Prevent Blindness Ohio. "Those that have vision care benefits may not know exactly how much of the treatment will be covered. And for those that are uninsured, services are available for qualified individuals."

Prevent Blindness Ohio recommends that you always get regular, comprehensive eye exams, but visit your eye doctor immediately if you experience the following cataract symptoms:

- Blurred vision, double vision, ghost images, the sense of a "film" over the eyes
- Lights seem too dim for reading or close-up work, or strong lights seem to "dazzle" eyes
- Changing eyeglass prescriptions often, without experiencing improvement
- A milky or yellowish spot appears in the pupil (the center of the eye that is normally black).

For free information on cataracts in both English and Spanish, or to receive the "Your Guide to Cataract Surgery" and "Medicare Benefits and Your Eyes" fact sheets, call Prevent Blindness Ohio at (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.*

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