



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**February 7, 2008**

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## **LITTLE KNOWN EYE DISEASE THREATENS VISION OF MILLIONS**

***Prevent Blindness Ohio Urges Public to Educate  
Themselves on AMD and Get an Eye Exam***

**Columbus, OH** –Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of vision loss in people aged 55 and older. It is a serious eye disease that affects the vision of more than 1.5 million Americans and 71,000 Ohioans. AMD robs people of their central vision and often, the ability to read a book, recognize a face, drive an automobile, see fine details, and distinguish some colors which greatly limits personal independence. Yet, only 30 percent of Americans are familiar with the disease, according to a study by AMD Alliance International.

Research from Prevent Blindness America shows that AMD costs the Ohio economy \$22.2 million annually, in direct costs for outpatient, inpatient and prescription drug services. Individually, the costs of outpatient services for AMD patients, between the ages of 40 and 64, are \$305 per year, with an additional \$110 in medications and vitamins.

AMD is a progressive disease that diminishes central vision. Over time, AMD patients must depend on their peripheral vision. There are two forms of AMD, "dry" and "wet." Dry AMD is the most common form of the disease and, according to the American Academy of Ophthalmology, 90 percent of AMD patients have the dry form. Approximately 10 to 20 percent of dry AMD cases will progress to wet AMD.

Wet AMD occurs when fragile, abnormal blood vessels are formed under the macula and begin to leak fluid and blood. Scar tissue develops and destroys the macula, which leads to vision loss. Studies show that without treatment, those diagnosed with "wet" AMD will become functionally blind within two years.

But AMD doesn't just take its toll on the eyes. It can also 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.

**-More-**

## **Prevent Blindness Ohio Encourages Eye Exams to Prevent Vision Loss from AMD**

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Jennifer Stanke, Prevent Blindness Ohio research grantee at The Ohio State University said, “I went into my research efforts with no real personal attachments to my work. Then, my beloved grandmother was diagnosed with AMD. Heartbreaking, I know the disease cannot be cured, but her progressive loss of sight could be slowed with the appropriate treatment. Though I am hopeful that different treatments are on the horizon, I am saddened that it may not be here in time to help my grandmother and disheartened that many young researchers are leaving the field due to low funding levels. Things need to change in support of biomedical research so that soon I can tell my grandmother of a new treatment for her eyes.”

“We are seeing some promising results from research studies around the world in regards to understanding AMD and the best methods to treat it,” said Sherill Williams, President and CEO of Prevent Blindness Ohio. “But even with the latest drug therapies, we are still waiting for a cure. Until that happens, the best way to save vision is through regular vision care with your eye care professional”, added Williams.

In order to educate the public and encourage Americans to visit their eye doctors, Prevent Blindness Ohio has declared February as Age-related Macular Degeneration Awareness Month. The non-profit group offers a free educational online resource, “The AMD Learning Center” at [www.preventblindness.org/amd](http://www.preventblindness.org/amd).

Healthy habits can lead to healthy eyes. The risk of eye disease and vision loss can be lowered if you:

- Eat healthy foods high in antioxidants, such as green leafy vegetables, and foods high in zinc and beta carotene
- Avoid trans fats
- Quit smoking
- Control blood pressure and cholesterol
- Exercise regularly
- Visit your eye care professional on a regular basis

For free information on AMD, please call Prevent Blindness Ohio at 800-301-2020 or visit [www.pbOhio.org](http://www.pbOhio.org).

Prevent Blindness Ohio, founded in 1957, is Ohio’s leading volunteer nonprofit public health organization dedicated to preventing blindness and preserving sight. It serves all 88 Ohio counties, providing direct services to more than 800,000 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.

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### **AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION (AMD) TALKING POINTS**

- About 1.65 million Americans age 50 and older have advanced, vision- threatening cases of AMD. (Vision Problems in the U.S., March 2002)

- Prevent Blindness America's 2007 research study, "*The Economic Impact of Vision Problems*" states that AMD costs the U.S. economy \$570 million and the Ohio economy \$22.2 million every year in direct medical costs for outpatient, inpatient and prescription drug services.
- Individually, the costs of outpatient services for AMD patients, between the ages of 40 and 64, are \$305 per year, with an additional \$110 in medications and vitamins.
- An estimated 500,000 new cases of wet AMD are diagnosed annually. Approximately 10 to 20 percent of dry AMD cases will progress to wet AMD (AMD Alliance International.)
- AMD is the leading cause of blindness in the Western world 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.)
- People with AMD are more than three times as likely to suffer from depression as the general population. (AMD Alliance International.)
- 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.
- 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.
- The World Health Organization names smoking as the only modifiable risk factor for AMD.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

## **AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION PSA**

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CAN YOU NAME THE LEADING CAUSE OF VISION LOSS IN THOSE AGED 55 AND OLDER?

IT'S AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION, OR AMD, AND IT AFFECTS THE VISION OF MORE THAN 71,000 OHIOANS. AMD ROBS PEOPLE OF THEIR CENTRAL VISION AND OFTEN, THE ABILITY TO READ A BOOK, RECOGNIZE A FACE, DRIVE AN AUTOMOBILE, SEE FINE DETAILS, AND DISTINGUISH SOME COLORS WHICH GREATLY LIMITS PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE. A VISIT TO YOUR EYE DOCTOR CAN HELP MINIMIZE THE DAMAGE IF AMD IS DETECTED AND TREATED EARLY. FOR FREE INFORMATION ON AMD AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP SAVE YOUR VISION, PLEASE CALL **PREVENT BLINDNESS OHIO** AT **800-301-2020** OR VISIT [WWW.PBOHIO.ORG](http://WWW.PBOHIO.ORG).

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