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MORE WOMEN LOSING SIGHT TO EYE DISEASE THAN MEN

Prevent Blindness America Urges Women to Help Protect their Vision With a Dilated Eye Exam

CHICAGO (March 25, 2008) – More women than men are diagnosed with vision threatening eye disease every year. Potentially blinding diseases such as glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy strike women in some cases almost twice as much as men. Although the theories for the cause of this vary, the numbers illustrate a disturbing truth.

An updated report from Prevent Blindness America and the National Eye Institute shows that not only have the numbers of age-related eye disease risen across the board, but that women are still largely more affected than men. For example, of the more than 2 million Americans age 50 and older that have AMD, more than 1.3 million of those cases are women. And, of the 4.4 million Americans ages 40 and older that have diabetic retinopathy, 2.3 million are female.

Of the more than 3.6 million Americans age 40 and older who suffer from visual impairment, including blindness, 2.3 million are women. Vision impairment is defined as having 20/40 or worse vision in the better eye even with eyeglasses. Prevent Blindness America has designated April as Women's Eye Health and Safety Month to raise awareness of these issues.

"Some may be under the impression that losing vision is just a simple part of the aging process but these numbers include many women in their 40's," said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America. "It's never too early to start caring for our eyes, and we strongly encourage women to make eye health a priority for themselves and their families today."

The 2008 update from the "Vision Problems in the U.S." study confirmed earlier projections that as the baby boomer population continues to age, the number of those diagnosed with vision problems is also increasing. Vision loss not only detracts from quality of life, it also has a significant burden on the U.S. economy. Prevent Blindness America estimates that costs associated with visual impairment and blindness costs \$51.4 billion year.

Dry eye syndrome, a condition where not enough natural tears are produced, is far more common in women as well. Approximately 6 million women and 3 million men have moderate to severe symptoms of dry eye syndrome, according to the National Women's Health Resource Center. It is more frequent in post-menopausal and pregnant women, due to hormonal fluctuations. In the most extreme cases, the cornea can become damaged without the proper lubrication.

“Fortunately, there is a simple way for women to protect their vision— get regular eye care,” added Garrett. “Only an eye doctor can effectively diagnose eye problems and, if detected early, can help to minimize the loss of vision.”

Prevent Blindness America urges all Americans to make an eye appointment immediately if they have the following symptoms:

- Unusual trouble adjusting to dark rooms;
- Difficulty focusing on near or distant objects;
- Squinting or blinking due to unusual sensitivity to light or glare;
- Change in color of iris;
- Red-rimmed, encrusted or swollen lids;
- Recurrent pain in or around eyes;
- Double vision;
- Dark spot at the center of viewing;
- Lines and edges appear distorted or wavy;
- Excess tearing or "watery eyes";
- Dry eyes with itching or burning; and
- Seeing spots or ghost-like images.

For more information on eye disease or a listing of Prevent Blindness America services in your state, please visit www.preventblindness.org or call 1-800-331-2020.

About Prevent Blindness America

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screenings, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the Web at www.preventblindness.org.