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GLAUCOMA ROBS VISION, PATIENTS MAY NOT BE AWARE OF THE DAMAGE BEING DONE

***Prevent Blindness America Promotes Dilated Eye Exams as Only Way
To Ensure Vision Health***

CHICAGO (Dec. 20, 2007) – For millions of Americans, the threat of vision loss is all too real. However, only half of them are aware that they have a potentially blinding eye disease. Glaucoma destroys peripheral vision and, over time, can cause blindness. The “sneak thief of sight” has no warning signs until sight has already been diminished. Once sight has been lost to glaucoma, it cannot be restored.

Glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness in the world, second only to cataracts, and the leading cause of blindness in African-Americans, according to the National Institutes of Health. Left untreated, glaucoma can lead to damage of the optic nerve, visual field loss, and ultimately sight loss. It affects one in 200 people age 50 and younger and one in 10 over the age of 80.

“We can’t stress enough how vitally important it is to have your eyes examined by a professional to protect sight,” said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America. “There’s no cure for glaucoma yet, but treatment can be effective if glaucoma is detected and treated early.”

In addition to the impact that glaucoma can have on quality of life, the financial implications are extremely significant. According to research funded by Prevent Blindness America, glaucoma costs the U.S. economy \$2.86 billion every year in direct medical costs for outpatient, inpatient and prescription drug services. Glaucoma patients between the ages of 40 and 64 years of age can expect to pay \$3,352 annually per person. For those 65 and older, the annual costs jump to \$5,243 per person. And those expenditures will only increase as medical costs continue to soar.

Prevent Blindness America has joined other leading eye care groups to build awareness during January’s National Glaucoma Awareness Month to educate the public on what they can do to help save their vision. The group also provides free information on the disease through its toll-free number and through the Web at the “Glaucoma Learning Center,” www.preventblindness.org/glaucoma.

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“The Glaucoma Web Discussion Forum,” also part of the Glaucoma Learning Center’s free online services, allows patients and caregivers the opportunity to discuss online all subjects related to the disease. Topics range from general information on the condition and its treatment, to shared experiences and emotional support.

Prevent Blindness America also offers free printed materials including the “Guide for People with Glaucoma.” This comprehensive booklet serves as a handbook for patients and includes general information about the disease as well as information on how to administer eye drops and types of glaucoma surgery.

Everyone is at risk for developing glaucoma. However, some factors that may increase the chance of having the disease include:

- **Age** – The older you are, the greater your risk.
- **Race** – African-Americans have glaucoma four to five times more often than others. African-Americans are also likely to have glaucoma at a younger age.
- **Family history** – If you have a parent, brother or sister with glaucoma, you are more likely to get glaucoma too. If you have glaucoma, your family members should get complete eye exams.
- **Medical history** – Diabetes, previous eye injuries, eye surgery or long-term steroid use can increase your risk of glaucoma.

Prevent Blindness America offers a variety of fact sheets and brochures including a glaucoma “Eye Q” quiz, a glaucoma 17-point checklist and a guide for people who have been diagnosed with the disease. Materials on glaucoma are available in both English and Spanish by calling 1-800-331-2020 or visiting www.preventblindness.org/glaucoma.

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.