

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **LACK OF INFORMATION ON LEADING CAUSE OF BLINDNESS COULD LEAVE SOME AMERICANS IN THE DARK**

### ***Prevent Blindness America Offers Public Free Educational Materials on Age-related Macular Degeneration***

**CHICAGO (Jan. 28, 2009)** – Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) currently affects the vision of more than 2 million Americans, ages 50 and older. AMD is a progressive disease that diminishes central vision and if left untreated, can result in severe vision loss and even blindness.

But despite the severe damage AMD can cause to sight, the public is still relatively unfamiliar with chronic eye disease. In fact, in 2008, AMD Alliance International conducted a survey that found more than half of all respondents had either never heard of AMD, or had heard of it but knew very little about it.<sup>i</sup>

Prevent Blindness America has declared February as Age-related Macular Degeneration Awareness Month in order to help educate the public on one of the leading causes of blindness in the world. The non-profit group offers a free educational online resource, “The AMD Learning Center” at [www.preventblindness.org/amd](http://www.preventblindness.org/amd) as well as information through its toll-free number.

The good news is that the effects of the disease can be diminished through early detection and treatment by an eye care professional. That is why it is imperative for the public to know about the disease including early warning signs and risk factors.

Those with AMD may experience the following symptoms:

- Straight lines, such as a flag pole or streetlight, may appear wavy
- A dark or empty spot may block the center of vision
- Written words or type may appear blurry

According to the National Eye Institute, risk factors for AMD include:

- Smoking- Smoking and even second-hand smoke may increase the risk of AMD
- Obesity- Research studies suggest a link between obesity and the progression of early stage AMD to advanced AMD
- Race- Caucasians are much more likely to lose vision from AMD than African Americans.
- Gender- Of the more than 2 million Americans age 50 and older that have AMD, more than 1.3 million of those cases are women

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

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- Family History- Those who have immediate family members with AMD are at a higher risk of developing the disease

“We urge everyone, especially if they are ages 40 and older, to go get a dilated eye exam as soon as possible,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. “Even if you don’t notice any signs of eye trouble today, you may already have an eye disease and not know it. Once detected, eye doctors may be able to slow the progression and help save vision.”

For free information on AMD and other blinding eye diseases, please visit Prevent Blindness America at [www.preventblindness.org](http://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 screening and training, 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](http://www.preventblindness.org).

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<sup>i</sup> In a survey of the general population, 11 percent of respondents indicated that they knew AMD very well, 12 percent indicated they know a fair amount, 25 percent know just a little bit about AMD, 23 percent have heard of AMD but know nothing about it, and 29 percent said they had never heard of AMD. *Eye Exams: Motivations and Barriers, April 18, 2008*, AMD Alliance International [www.amdalliance.org](http://www.amdalliance.org).