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NUMBER OF EYE DISEASE CASES EXPECTED TO SOAR DUE TO DIABETES EPIDEMIC

CHICAGO (Oct. 28, 2009) – As the number of Americans with diabetes continues to increase, so does the expected increase in the number of cases of major eye disease including diabetic retinopathy, cataracts and glaucoma. Today, there are more than 23 million Americans, or close to 8 percent, who have diabetes. Projections from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that the number will balloon to 48 million by the year 2050. Patients with diabetes are at increased risk for developing these types of eye disease.

Diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness in adults 20-74 years of age. A new study estimates that the number of diabetes patients who have diabetic retinopathy will increase from 5.5 million in 2005 to 16 million by 2050. The “Projection of Diabetic Retinopathy and Other Major Eye Diseases Among People With Diabetes Mellitus” by Jinan B. Saaddine, M.D., M.P.H., et al, also stated that the number of diabetes patients with cataracts will increase to 10 million and the number with glaucoma will increase to 1.4 million.

“The number of those who are affected by diabetes today is alarming, but the projected increase of patients is staggering,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. “Knowing that one of the major health complications of the disease is blindness reminds us how important it is to educate the public on the increased risk for vision loss and what people can do today to help save their vision for tomorrow.”

The study also predicts a dramatic increase in the number of eye disease cases in Hispanic and African American populations. The research estimates that Hispanics with diabetes in all age groups will have substantially large increases in diabetes-related eye disease. African Americans are five times more likely than Caucasians to develop glaucoma. And, rates for African Americans with diabetes with glaucoma are expected to rise the most among those age 50 and older, and the rates of cataracts for those 75 and older is expected to increase more than 600 percent in woman and close to 700 percent in men.

In an effort to educate the public on diabetes and its potential effect on vision, Prevent Blindness America has declared November as Diabetic Eye Disease Month. The organization provides free information to patients on diabetic eye disease, risk factors,

treatment options and Medicare benefits through its toll-free number, (800) 331-2020 and Web site, preventblindness.org/diabetes.

Prevent Blindness America also recommends that everyone take the following steps to protect their eyesight:

- See an eye doctor at least once a year if you have diabetes or if you are at high risk. For some, diabetic retinopathy is one of the first signs that they have diabetes.
- Maintain a healthy weight – if you are overweight, even a modest weight loss can help prevent Type 2 diabetes.
- Increase your physical activity – exercising 30 minutes a day, five times a week can cut your risk of Type 2 diabetes by more than half. It is important to check with your doctor before starting an exercise program.
- Watch and control your blood sugar levels and blood pressure.
- Quitting smoking can significantly reduce the risk for diabetic retinopathy as well as other health benefits.
- All women who are pregnant or who are planning to become pregnant and have been diagnosed with diabetes should get a full, dilated eye exam.

For more information on diabetic eye diseases, please call Prevent Blindness America at (800) 331-2020 or visit preventblindness.org/diabetes.

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 preserving 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, Prevent Blindness America is committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call (800) 331-2020 or visit us on the Web at preventblindness.org.

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