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## **PREVENT BLINDNESS AMERICA KICKS-OFF FOURTH ANNUAL EYES ON CAPITOL HILL EVENT**

### ***National Non-profit Gives Those Affected by Vision Loss the Opportunity to Meet with Government Leaders***

**CHICAGO (March 2, 2009)** – Today, Prevent Blindness America, the nation’s oldest volunteer eye health and safety organization and its affiliates kick-off the fourth annual Eyes on Capitol Hill event. The program, which runs from March 2-4, brings together those who have been touched by vision loss, eye disease and eye accidents to speak to their own government leaders and policymakers.

Through a nationwide search for applicants, adults and children whose lives have been impacted by either eye disease or eye injuries were selected. The goal of the program is to demonstrate to the nation’s leaders the importance of vision care funding initiatives through the compelling stories of their own constituents. The program is made possible by generous contributions from Pfizer, Inc. and VSP Vision Care.

In addition to sharing their personal experiences, the Eyes on Capitol Hill advocates will ask congressional and senate members specifically to:

- Increase funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Vision Health Initiative.
- Support efforts of the Maternal and Child Health Bureau’s (MCHB) efforts to develop and implement a core vision-related reporting item for state MCH programs.
- Join the Congressional Vision Caucus (CVC)- a bicameral and bipartisan coalition of more than 100 Congressional Members focused on vision research, prevention/public health programs, and access to treatment and rehabilitation.

Of the 130 million Americans aged 40 and older, more than 30 million suffer from leading causes of vision loss such as cataract, diabetic retinopathy, age-related macular degeneration and glaucoma, according to the newly revised edition of Prevent Blindness America’s “Vision Problems in the U.S.” study.

According to the National Eye Institute, nationwide, two to five percent of children ages three to five have amblyopia, three to four percent have strabismus, and 10-15 percent have significant refractive error. Additionally, vision problems can negatively impact

learning and school performance, as 80 percent of learning in young children is done visually.

On March 3, Prevent Blindness America will hold its first-ever CVC Reception at 5:30 p.m. in Washington D.C. in the Rayburn House office building on Capitol Hill. The event is co-hosted by other leading eye health organizations and is being held to recognize the important work and dedication to vision causes that CVC members continue to perform. The CVC is currently co-chaired by Reps. Gene Green (D-TX), Rep. David Price (D-NC), Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) and Patrick Tiberi (R-OH).

And on Wednesday, March 4, in addition to Hill visits from Eyes on Capitol Hill advocates, Prevent Blindness America will also hold its first ever Capitol Call In Day. All across the country, Americans are being asked to call their U.S. senators and representatives to urge them to make vision health a priority. Those interested can go to [preventblindness.org](http://preventblindness.org) to find out more details on how to participate.

“As our healthcare system faces the effects of the broader economic downturn, it is critical that we make sure our representatives are aware of the human cost that vision loss can have,” added Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. “We want to stress the need for public access to preventive services and vision health programs.”

For more information on Eyes on Capitol Hill or on how you can contact your state representative to ask for their support on vision-related issues, call Prevent Blindness America at (800) 331-2020 or visit [preventblindness.org](http://preventblindness.org).

### **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 (800) 331-2020 or visit us on the Web at [www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org).