

-FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-

EyeCare America and Prevent Blindness America Team Up to Help Preserve Vision Against Cataracts

*National Non-profits Provide No-Cost Educational Materials and Eye Exams to Seniors
during National Cataract Awareness Month this August*

August 3, 2009 – San Francisco, CA –Did you know that cataracts are the leading cause of vision loss among adults 55 and older? In fact, more than half the people over age 65 have some form of cataract development.

A cataract is a clouding of the lens in the eye, the part of the eye that focuses light and produces clear images. Inside of the eye, the lens is contained in a sealed bag or capsule. As old cells die they become trapped within the capsule. Over time, more cells die and accumulate, causing the lens to cloud, making images look blurred or fuzzy. For most people, cataracts are a natural result of aging. But, eye injuries, certain medications, UV exposure and diseases such as diabetes and alcoholism have also been known to cause cataracts.

In the early stages, stronger lighting and eyeglasses may lessen vision problems caused by cataracts. At a certain point, however, surgery may be needed to improve vision. Cataract surgery is the most frequently performed surgery in the United States. More than 90 percent of the people who have cataract surgery regain useful vision.

“Unfortunately, there are age-related eye diseases for which there are no cures that cause severe vision loss and blindness, like glaucoma or diabetic eye disease,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. “The good news is that cataract can be effectively treated and vision restored by an eye surgeon (ophthalmologist). We encourage everyone to educate themselves about what they can do to help prevent cataract as well as visit an eye care professional to see which treatment is right for them.”

In honor of “Cataract Awareness Month,” taking place in August, EyeCare America and Prevent Blindness America are encouraging people to make their vision health a priority. Prevent Blindness America offers the public free educational information on cataracts in both English and Spanish through its toll free number, (800) 331-2020, or Web site at preventblindness.org. The non-profit organization also offers information on Medicare benefits in relation to cataract surgery and care as well as a guide on what patients can expect if surgery is required.

EyeCare America offers the unique Seniors EyeCare Program which offers eye exams and care to seniors who are without an ophthalmologist (a medical eye doctor).

The program effectively bridges the health care gap for the aging U.S. population. Through the program, those who are eligible receive a dilated medical exam and up to one year of treatment at no out-of-pocket cost. EyeCare America is able to provide this no cost care through its network of volunteer ophthalmologists who waive patient co-payments and accept Medicare as payment in full for their services. Patients without insurance are not charged.

EyeCare America's Seniors EyeCare Program is designed for people who:

- Are U.S. citizens or legal residents
- Are age 65 and older
- Have not seen an ophthalmologist in three or more years
- Do not belong to an HMO or the VA

"My eyesight has improved a lot and I feel blessed... But for you and (my doctor) I might still be groping in the darkness and stumbling throughout the rest of my life," said Mr. Atma Tyagi, a 78-year old EyeCare America patient who underwent cataract surgery.

For a Seniors EyeCare Program referral, those interested may call the toll-free help line 1.800.222.EYES (3937). The Seniors EyeCare Program help line operates 24 hours a day, every day, year-round. The Seniors EyeCare Program is co-sponsored by the Knights Templar Eye Foundation, Inc. and Alcon.

About EyeCare America

Established in 1985, EyeCare America, the public service program of the Foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, is committed to the preservation of sight, accomplishing its mission through public service and education. EyeCare America provides eye care services to the medically underserved and for those at increased risk for eye disease through its corps of 7,000 volunteer ophthalmologists dedicated to serving their communities. More than 90 percent of the care made available is provided at no out-of-pocket cost to the patients. EyeCare America includes programs for seniors, glaucoma, AMD, diabetes and children, and is the largest program of its kind in American medicine. Since its inception, EyeCare America has helped more than 1 million people. EyeCare America is a non-profit program whose success is made possible through charitable contributions from individuals, foundations and corporations. More information can be found at: www.eyecareamerica.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 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 (800) 331-2020 or visit us on the Web at preventblindness.org.

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NOTE TO EDITORS AND PRODUCERS: High-resolution images and interviews with EyeCare America or Prevent Blindness America spokespeople, physicians and patients available upon request.