

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information:
Prevent Blindness America
Sarah Hecker
(312) 363-6035

PREVENT BLINDNESS AMERICA RECEIVES \$10,000 GRANT FROM NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE

Grant Will Fund Diabetic Eye Disease Education Program to Help Underserved Communities

Chicago (May 5, 2009) – Prevent Blindness America has been awarded a \$10,000 grant from the National Eye Institute (NEI), a component of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The nation’s oldest volunteer eye health and safety organization will use the grant to fund “**The Diabetic Eye Disease Educator Certification Program,**” a comprehensive program designed to teach outreach personnel and allied health professionals about the visual system and the signs, symptoms and complications of the secondary diseases of diabetes, diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma.

“We are in the midst of a diabetes crisis in this country that unfortunately, is only going to get worse. The number of diabetes cases continues to rise and with that comes many devastating side effects, including the potential for blindness,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. “We are thrilled that the NEI has entrusted us with the much-needed funds to help educate the public on what they can do to preserve sight from these diabetic eye diseases.”

Diabetes is expected to affect more than 48 million Americans by the year 2050. And, it is estimated that currently, more than 4.4 million Americans over the age of 40 have diabetic retinopathy, according to the 2008 “Vision Problems in the U.S.” report from Prevent Blindness America and the NEI. In fact, for some, diabetic retinopathy is one of the first signs they have diabetes.

The innovative “Diabetic Eye Disease Educator Certification Program” is designed for those in the health outreach programs who serve populations at the highest risk for developing diabetes including African Americans, Hispanics and Latinos. In fact, diabetic retinopathy affects more Hispanics than any other group, ages 40 and older.

“We already know that diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness in adults 20-74 years of age,” added Parry. “Through this new program, we hope to educate those on the front lines of public health in order to help those in our community who are underserved.”

The financial cost of diabetic eye disease as it stands today is equally as devastating. According to the Prevent Blindness America “Economic Impact of Vision Problems: The Toll of Major Adult Eye Disorders,” Visual Impairment, and Blindness on the U.S.

Economy study, diabetic retinopathy costs \$490 million annually in direct costs for outpatient, inpatient and prescription drug services.

For more information on Prevent Blindness America or diabetic eye disease, please call (800) 331-2020 or visit 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 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.

###