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**ECONOMIC IMPACT OF VISION LOSS IN THE UNITED STATES
ESTIMATED AT \$51.4 BILLION**

New Report Highlights Increasing Burden of Vision Problems on Americans

CHICAGO (April 18, 2007) – Prevent Blindness America today released a new report estimating the costs associated with adult vision problems in the United States at \$51.4 billion. *The Economic Impact of Vision Problems: The Toll of Major Adult Eye Disorders, Visual Impairment, and Blindness on the U.S. Economy* provides both the costs to the individual and their caregivers, and the impact on the U.S. economy of vision conditions including age-related macular degeneration (AMD), cataract, diabetic retinopathy, primary open-angle glaucoma, refractive error, visual impairment and blindness.

This report marks Phase III of a concerted effort by Prevent Blindness America to address the critical need for better eye health and to ensure that sufficient governmental resources are dedicated to the research, treatment and prevention of eye-related diseases. In 2002, Prevent Blindness America released the “Vision Problems in the U.S.” (VPUS) study detailing eye disease prevalence data on a national and state level. Following that report, the organization announced the “Vision Problems Action Plan” to effectively address the VPUS results. *The Economic Impact of Vision Problems: The Toll of Major Adult Eye Disorders, Visual Impairment, and Blindness on the U.S. Economy* brings to light the substantial effect vision

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problems have beyond physical and emotional implications by analyzing the considerable financial impact vision loss has on the individual, caregivers, the government and insurance premiums.

"These astounding numbers underscore the significant need to address the overall impact of vision problems on individuals, their families and our society," said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America. "The goal of this report is to ensure our nation's leaders understand the seriousness of America's eye health and create a call-to-action to focus on treatment and prevention."

The full results are being announced today at a national vision symposium that brings together leading ophthalmic researchers and report authors, public health officials, advocacy organizations, caregivers and patients to discuss the important findings from the study.

Two groups of health economists collaborated to produce the comprehensive report. A team led by David Rein, Ph.D., of RTI International and the CDC researched the costs to the U.S. economy and determined the impact to be \$35.4 billion. Kevin Frick, Ph.D., of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and his team estimated the financial impact to the individual, caregivers and others at \$16 billion. The total financial impact is \$51.4 billion, which exceeds the total combined profits of the top two 2006 Fortune 500 companies, Exxon Mobil and Wal-Mart Stores.

"As the baby boomer generation is aging, my research shows that the number of people in the United States with impaired vision -- including blindness -- could increase by at least 60 percent over the next three decades," said Dr. Frick. "It is a troubling reality that an increasing number of Americans are going to be faced with escalating costs due to vision loss unless we focus on prevention."

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Impact to the U.S. economy was determined through analysis of direct medical costs, other direct costs, such as nursing home care and government programs, and lost productivity. Costs to the individual include medical care expenditures, informal care costs and health utility loss. Health utility loss refers to an evaluation of the quality of life in chronic medical conditions.

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.

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