



## Vision and Eye Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention FY 2012 Issue Brief

### **FY 2012 Funding Request**

To ensure that the nation has the public health interventions and data systems in place to address the growing public health problem of vision loss, Prevent Blindness America respectfully calls upon Congress to provide at least \$3.229 million in FY 2012 to sustain vision and eye health initiatives at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

### **Need**

An estimated 80 million Americans have a potentially blinding eye disease, 3 million have low vision, 1.1 million are legally blind, and 200,000 are more severely visually impaired. Vision is critical to conducting activities of daily living, is a portal for language, and affects developmental learning, communicating, working, health, and quality of life. Additionally, we know that the annual cost of adult vision problems in the U.S. comes to approximately \$51.4 billion. Effective public health interventions, if adequately funded and implemented, can help increase early identification of individuals at-risk for vision loss, reduce the incidence of blindness and vision loss, and improve eye health.

### **Vision and Eye Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention\***

The CDC serves a critical national role in promoting vision and eye health. Since 2003, the CDC and Prevent Blindness America have collaborated with other partners to create a more effective public health approach to vision loss prevention and eye health promotion. The CDC works to:

- Promote eye health and prevent vision loss;
- Improve the health and lives of people living with vision loss by preventing complications, disabilities, and burden;
- Reduce vision and eye health related disparities; and
- Integrate vision health with other public health strategies.

### **Integrating Vision Health Into Broader Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Efforts**

One of the cornerstone activities of the vision and eye health work at the CDC is its support and encouragement of efforts to better integrate state-level initiatives to address vision and eye disease by approaching vision health through other public health prevention, treatment, and research efforts. Vision loss is associated with a myriad of other serious, chronic, life threatening, and disabling conditions, including diabetes, depression, unintentional injuries, and other health problems and behavioral risk factors such as tobacco use. Leveraging scarce resources and recognizing the numerous connections between eye health and other diseases, the CDC works to integrate and connect vision health initiatives to other state, local, and community health programs.

For example, state-based programs to prevent and reduce diabetes should include efforts to educate patients and health care providers of the relationship between diabetes and certain eye problems, such as diabetic retinopathy and cataracts. Similarly, state initiatives to reduce the incidence of falls among older Americans should include vision screening, as studies have found that one of the leading causes of falls and injuries among older adults is unaddressed vision problems. To advance state-based vision health integration, funding to the CDC is supporting two joint efforts, one in New York and the other in Texas, focused on integrating vision-related services at the state and local level. Working together, the New York State Health Department and Prevent Blindness Tri-State staff are promoting vision loss prevention strategies among community groups and vision partners and eye care organizations, and establishing a state vision preservation plan. In a similar effort, Prevent Blindness Texas is working with the Office of Border Health at the Texas Department of State Health Services to address vision problems along the border

---

\* Currently, the CDC's vision and eye health programs are coordinated through the Vision and Eye Health Initiative in the Diabetes Division of the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

counties in Texas. The goal of these integration efforts, being advanced by the CDC, is to ensure that vision loss and eye health promotion are incorporated into all relevant local, state, and federal public health interventions, prevention and treatment programs, and other initiatives that impact causes of . and factors that contribute to . vision problems and blindness. By integrating efforts and coordinating approaches in this manner, federal and state resources will be used more efficiently, eye health problems and vision loss can be reduced, and the overall health and well-being of individuals and communities will be improved.

### **Identifying and Preventing Vision Problems through Community-Based Strategies**

The CDC supports private sector efforts to develop and evaluate better ways to identify and treat individuals with potential eye disease, vision loss, and other ocular conditions. Specifically, CDC funding has supported:

- A study to assess the overall effectiveness and costs associated with implementing an adult vision and eye health history and risk assessment/referral program is being conducted by Johns Hopkins University, in partnership with Prevent Blindness Ohio. Working in collaboration with the Physician's Free Clinic in Columbus, Ohio and Akron Community Health Resources, a federally qualified health center located in Akron, Ohio the project is establishing vision assessment, screening, and linkage to care as a fully integrated function of adult patient care. This project, in its upcoming final year, will further investigate the best methods for identifying patients who need eye care services and providing linkages to follow-up care.
- An initiative spearheaded by Duke University and Prevent Blindness North Carolina includes an evaluation of the benefit of pediatric and school-based vision screening . an effort that involves training vision screeners; providing screenings to first, third, and fifth graders in North Carolina elementary schools; and tracking the results of referral for follow-up care. The project identified the need to ensure proper on-going training and education of pediatricians on vision screening. With the approval of the American Board of Pediatrics, the project developed a maintenance of certification module to improve office-based preschool vision screening.
- An Adult Demonstration Project, conducted by Prevent Blindness Georgia, provided training for senior center staff and offered eye examinations and eye health education at senior centers. During the first three years of the program, 723 at-risk adults were given eye examinations and 611 were referred for follow-up care. After the initial vision clinic funding ended, health coordinators were motivated and inspired to ensure funding for this valuable service through their own state-provided budgets.

### **Data Collection**

Understanding the breadth and depth of vision and eye health issues across the nation is paramount to ensuring appropriate allocation of resources and effective deployment of targeted interventions. Thus, the CDC supports programs and systems that collect, evaluate, and disseminate critical vision health data.

- The CDC developed the first optional Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)<sup>6</sup> vision module, which collects state-based information on access to eye care and the prevalence of eye disease and eye injury. Early in 2011 the CDC will publish a report describing visual impairment as a serious public health issue affecting more than 2.9 million Americans. The report, entitled "The State of Vision, Aging, and Public Health in America," utilizes state-based BRFSS data. Unfortunately, in part due to insufficient funding, only 19 states currently use the vision module; this lack of broad adoption precludes the CDC, Congress, and other stakeholders from having the information they need to understand and address the full scope of vision loss and eye health problems facing the nation.
- CDC funding is supporting programming to advance a joint endeavor between Duke University and Prevent Blindness America to conduct a systematic evidence review and analysis of existing datasets to describe the delivery systems of vision-related services and to identify new areas for policy evaluation or clinical research. This information will help identify the most at-risk populations and highlight gaps in care and service delivery to ensure that public and private resources are allocated to the areas of greatest need.

---

<sup>6</sup> BRFSS is a state-based system of health surveys that collects information on chronic disease and injury.