



Vision and Eye Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 Issue Brief

FY 2013 Funding Request

To ensure that the nation has the resources to address the growing public health problem of vision loss, Prevent Blindness America respectfully calls upon Congress to provide continued funding of at least \$1 million in FY 2013 to sustain vision and eye health initiatives at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Adequate funding provided by Congress in FY 2013 will allow the CDC to replicate the vision integration projects begun in New York and Texas in two to four other states.

Background

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 vision and 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. Together with its partners, CDC has worked 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

A cornerstone activity 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 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 on the relationship between diabetes and certain eye problems, such as diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, 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 has supported 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 state health departments of these states and the state-based affiliates of Prevent Blindness America promoted vision loss prevention strategies among community groups and vision partners, and established state vision preservation plans. The goal of these integration efforts was 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 were used more efficiently, eye health problems and vision loss were reduced, and the overall health and well-being of individuals and communities were improved.

* 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.