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EYE DISEASE CONTINUING TO INCREASE AMONG AMERICANS

Latest Data Shows Number of Eye Disease Patients Rising

CHICAGO (April 2, 2008) – Millions of Americans are currently living with age-related eye disease and, according to the latest research from Prevent Blindness America and the National Eye Institute, that number is continuing to climb. With more than 130 million Americans aged 40 and older, more than 30 million suffer from leading causes of vision loss such as cataract, diabetic retinopathy, macular degeneration and glaucoma, according to the newly revised edition of the “Vision Problems in the U.S.” study.

The study was an updating of the data from the 2002 Vision Problems in the U.S. report on the prevalence of eye diseases and conditions in America. Information gathered was the result of data collection from a systematic review of the major epidemiological studies from leading ophthalmologic epidemiologists.

Revised data from the Vision Problems in the U.S. study showed that among Americans aged 40 and older:

- Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) cases rose 25 percent, the largest increase of the major eye diseases. Currently, 2 million Americans have been diagnosed with AMD.
- Diabetic retinopathy affects more than 4.4 million. As the diabetes epidemic rages on, the number of cases of the disease will continue to soar.
- There are 2.29 million American adults with glaucoma, the sneak thief of sight. Yet 2 million more are estimated to have the disease and do not know it.
- Cataract is the leading cause of blindness in the world and 22.3 million American adults have the disease. Although surgery can be highly successful, not all Americans are fortunate enough to have access to affordable care.

“Our research shows that vision loss continues to threaten the quality of life for millions of Americans,” said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America. “Our challenge continues to be education, whether it be convincing the public to practice regular eye care or by convincing our government leaders that millions of precious healthcare dollars can be saved through prevention services.”

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As the baby boomer population continues to age, the number of those who are visually impaired is expected to double in the next 30 years. And, from an economic perspective, the costs associated with adult vision problems in the United States are \$51.4 billion. Research from Prevent Blindness America's 2007 "Economic Impact of Vision Problems: The Toll of Major Adult Eye Disorders, Visual Impairment, and Blindness on the U.S. Economy," totaled the financial costs of vision conditions to individuals and their caregivers, and the impact on the economy.

"The good news is that in most cases, the effects of eye disease can be minimized through early detection and treatment," added Garrett. "We strongly urge everyone to make an appointment with their eye care professional today to help protect their sight!"

For more information on eye disease or to receive a copy of the 2008 Vision Problems in the U.S. report, please call Prevent Blindness America at 1-800-331-2020 or visit www.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 screenings, 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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