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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Vision Loss from the “Sneak Thief of Sight” Can Be Diminished with Early Diagnosis and Treatment**

***Prevent Blindness America Joins in National Glaucoma Awareness Month in Effort to Save Sight from Second Leading Cause of Blindness***

**CHICAGO (Dec. 19, 2011)** – Today, more than 2.2 million Americans age 40 and older have open angle glaucoma, the most common form of glaucoma. At least half don't even know they have it. Glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness in the world, second only to cataracts, and the leading cause of blindness in African-Americans. According to research funded by Prevent Blindness America, glaucoma costs the U.S. economy \$2.86 billion every year in direct medical costs for outpatient, inpatient and prescription drug services.

As part of January's National Glaucoma Awareness Month, Prevent Blindness America is joining with other leading eye health organizations in encouraging everyone to educate themselves on the disease as well as make a New Year's resolution to make eye health a priority.

Glaucoma has long been termed the “sneak thief of sight” because it slowly takes away vision, often without the patient even realizing it. Glaucoma damages the optic nerve which sends information from the eyes to the brain. When the optic nerve is damaged, peripheral vision begins to diminish. If left untreated, over time, glaucoma may also damage central vision. Unfortunately, once symptoms are detected, the effectiveness of treatment diminishes. Once vision is lost, it cannot be restored.

Risk factors for glaucoma include advancing age, family history, nearsightedness, eye injury or surgery and the use of steroid medications. Race is another major risk factor as, according to the National Eye Institute, glaucoma is five times more likely to occur in blacks than in whites and blacks are four times more likely to go blind from it. Hispanics are more likely to develop glaucoma after age 60 than any other group.

Prevent Blindness America provides free resources to educate consumers on glaucoma, including treatment options and general information at “The Glaucoma Learning Center,” a free website at [www.preventblindness.org/glaucoma](http://www.preventblindness.org/glaucoma). Free printed materials are available by request including the “Guide for People with Glaucoma.” This

comprehensive booklet serves as a handbook for patients and includes information on what to expect during treatment and even a list of questions to ask the eye doctor.

The Glaucoma Learning Center also hosts the “Glaucoma Web Discussion Forum” that allows patients and caregivers the opportunity to discuss online all subjects related to the disease. Topics range from general information on the condition and its treatment, to shared experiences and emotional support.

“We want to stress to everyone that vision can be saved from glaucoma through early diagnosis and treatment,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. “Please visit our website or call our toll-free number to get all the free information you can to educate yourself on risk factors, treatment options and even Medicare coverage. Let’s all commit to make 2012 the year to make our eyes a priority and save our sight!”

For more information on glaucoma please call Prevent Blindness America at (800) 331-2020 or visit [preventblindness.org/glaucoma](http://preventblindness.org/glaucoma).

### **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, Prevent Blindness America is 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 [preventblindness.org](http://preventblindness.org) or [facebook.com/preventblindness](https://facebook.com/preventblindness).

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