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Prevent Blindness Study Projects Number of Cases and Costs Related to Glaucoma to Soar in Years to Come

CHICAGO (Dec. 17, 2014) – According to the 2014 Prevent Blindness “[Future of Vision: Forecasting the Prevalence and Costs of Vision Problems](#)” report, more than 2.8 million Americans currently have glaucoma. Those numbers are projected to jump by 50 percent by 2032. And, there will be an estimated 92 percent increase, or 5.5 million cases, by 2050.

Glaucoma is an eye disease that causes loss of sight by damaging a part of the eye called the optic nerve. This nerve sends information from the eyes to the brain. When glaucoma damages the optic nerve, patches of vision are lost, usually side vision (peripheral vision).

Medical treatment costs related to glaucoma and disorders of the optic nerve are also projected to skyrocket in the coming years. Today, more than \$6 billion is spent annually on the disease. In 2032, the number jumps to \$12 billion a year and by 2050, the annual medical treatment cost is estimated to be \$17.3 billion.

In addition, the study also found that currently 64 percent of glaucoma patients are white and 20 percent are black. By 2050, most glaucoma patients will be non-white, due primarily to the rapid increase in Hispanic glaucoma patients. By 2050, blacks and Hispanics will each constitute about 20 percent of all glaucoma patients. By 2018, the largest age group of glaucoma patients will be 70-79. The largest age group will be 80-89 after 2032.

January has been declared as National Glaucoma Awareness Month by Prevent Blindness and other leading eye health organizations. The goal is to help educate patients on the “sneak thief of sight” including risk factors, treatment options and public health resources. The national non-profit group hosts the online “[Glaucoma Learning Center](#)” and provides additional free information via its toll free number at (800) 331-2020.

Types of glaucoma include:

- **Chronic (Open Angle) Glaucoma:** The most common form. In open angle glaucoma, aqueous fluid drains too slowly and pressure inside the eye builds up. It usually results from aging of the drainage channel, which doesn't work as well over time. However, younger people can also get this type of glaucoma.
- **Normal Tension Glaucoma:** This is a form of open angle glaucoma not related to high pressure. People with normal tension glaucoma may be unusually sensitive to normal levels of pressure. Reduced blood supply to the optic nerve may also play a role in normal tension glaucoma.
- **Acute (Angle Closure) Glaucoma:** Those of Asian and Native American descent are at higher risk for this form of glaucoma. It occurs when the drainage system of the eye becomes blocked. It causes a sudden rise in pressure, requiring immediate, emergency medical care. The signs are usually serious and may include blurred vision, severe headaches, eye pain, nausea, vomiting or seeing rainbow-like halos around lights. Occasionally, the condition may be without symptoms; similar to open angle.
- **Secondary Glaucoma:** Secondary glaucoma is the result of another eye condition or disease, such as inflammation, trauma, or tumor.

“By getting a complete dilated eye exam, doctors can detect glaucoma and other eye diseases and help minimize the damaging effects by treating it early,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness. “We wish everyone a happy and healthy 2015 and urge everyone to protect their vision by scheduling an eye exam today!”

Prevent Blindness offers free fact sheets to help answer common questions about health insurance, Medicare coverage for glaucoma, the Affordable Care Act and eye care. These may be found at www.preventblindness.org/health-insurance-and-your-eyes.

For more information on glaucoma, please call Prevent Blindness at (800) 331-2020 or visit www.preventblindness.org/glaucoma-learning-center.

About Prevent Blindness

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness 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 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 and regional offices, Prevent Blindness 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 or facebook.com/preventblindness.