

April 6, 2017

Richard Besser, MD, President & CEO  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Judith Monroe, MD, FAAFP, President & CEO  
CDC Foundation

Anne Schuchat, MD, RADM, USPHS, Acting Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Dear Drs. Besser, Schuchat, and Monroe,

On behalf of a broad spectrum of organizations whose collective interests are ensuring optimal vision, the eye health of our nation and our communities, and functional independence for those with vision loss, we thank the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the CDC Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) for your important work on the **500 Cities Project** and the recent launch of your website [500 Cities: Local Data for Better Health](#). This will be a much needed asset for those working to improve the health of their local communities. *We are concerned, however, that vision and eye health was not included alongside the 27 chronic disease measures tracked.*

Eye health is highly valued across the lifespan – vision plays an important role in children’s success in school, adults’ employability, and older adults’ sustained independence. And while many living with vision loss experience a quality of life equal to that of their sighted peers, according to one recent survey, Americans across all racial and ethnic lines describe losing vision as *potentially* having the greatest negative impact on their life ([“Public Attitudes About Eye and Vision Health”](#)).

***According to RWJF’s own [Chronic Care: Making the Case for Ongoing Care](#), eye disorders are the fifth leading chronic condition among those aged 65 years and over and seventh across all age groups. This same study finds that eye disorders are the third most prevalent chronic condition among children, behind only asthma and other upper respiratory disease.***

We note that the 500 Cities initiative relies on data from the CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, the Census 2010 population, and the American Community Survey estimates. While it is far from complete, there are avenues in each of these to gather vision-related information. And where there are gaps, we encourage efforts to fill them.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) recently released a report that recognizes that for too long vision and eye health have not received the attention and investment they warrant, given their importance to public health ([“Making Eye Health a Population Health Imperative: Vision for Tomorrow”](#)).

As we age, we are more likely to experience other chronic conditions such as diabetes, hearing impairment, heart problems, hypertension, joint symptoms, low back pain, and stroke at the same time as vision loss. In the absence of high-quality rehabilitation and supports, these multiple conditions can lead to falls, injury, depression, social isolation, diminished health-related quality of life, and premature death. However, many health initiatives at the community, city, and state levels do not fully take into

account either the broad range of vision disorders and their comorbidities or their consequences for health and quality of life.

The above-mentioned NASEM report states that “vision impairment and blindness are appropriate targets for surveillance because they adversely affect a large portion of the population, affect populations unequally, can be improved by treatment and preventive efforts, and will become an increasing burden as the population ages.”

As you well know, surveillance is at the heart of public health. The CDC’s Vision Health Initiative is currently supporting a project – *The Vision and Eye Health Surveillance System*. We applaud this effort as an important step. However, given the prevalence of vision problems and the many comorbidities thereof, we believe including vision problems alongside the 27 chronic disease measures currently in the 500 Cities Project will draw attention to the scope of this challenge and, more importantly, help lead to stronger interventions in our communities and states and have a major impact on the nation’s health.

As community partners in vision and eye health, we collectively acknowledge the good work of the 500 Cities Project and recommend that surveillance of vision concerns be added to this important initiative.

Sincerely,

ACB of Wisconsin

Alabama Lions Sight Conservation Association

Alabama Vision Coalition

American Academy of Ophthalmology

American Academy of Optometry

American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus

American Association of Diabetes Educators

American Association on Health and Disability

American Council of the Blind

American Council of the Blind of Nebraska

American Council of the Blind of New Mexico

American Foundation for the Blind

American Optometric Association

American Society of Ophthalmic Registered Nurses

Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER)

Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology

Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired

Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry

Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology

Beaver County (PA) Association for the Blind

Bay State Council of the Blind

Blair/Clearfield Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired

Blind Association of Butler and Armstrong

Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh

Blind LGBT Pride International  
Blindskills  
Bosma Enterprises  
BrightFocus Foundation  
Bucks County (PA) Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired  
Byers Eye Institute at Stanford University  
Cahaba Valley Health Care  
Cambria County (PA) Association for the Blind & Handicapped  
Case Western Reserve University School of Nursing  
Casey Eye Institute, Oregon Health and Science University  
Center for the Visually Impaired, Atlanta  
Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Pennsylvania  
Center for Vision Loss  
Central Susquehanna Sight Services  
Central Ohio Lions Eye Bank  
Cincinnati Association f/t Blind & Visually Impaired  
Cincinnati Eye Institute  
Cincinnati Eye Institute Foundation  
ClearVision Optometry - VisionSource network  
Columbia River Services for the Blind  
Combat Blindness International, Inc.  
Community Services for Sight  
Department of Ophthalmology, Georgetown University School of Medicine  
Department of Ophthalmology, NYU Langone Medical Center  
Department of Ophthalmology, Rutgers-New Jersey Medical School  
Department of Ophthalmology, University of Alabama Birmingham  
Department of Ophthalmology, University of California San Francisco  
Department of Ophthalmology, University of Florida  
Department of Ophthalmology, University of Kansas Medical Center  
Department of Ophthalmology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Department of Ophthalmology, University of Pittsburgh  
Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences, Case Western Reserve University  
Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences, Medical College of Wisconsin  
Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences, University of Louisville, Kentucky  
Duke University Eye Center  
Emory Eye Center  
Eye Bank Association of America  
Eyesight Foundation of Alabama  
Family Vision Center  
Fayette County (PA) Association for the Blind  
Florida Association of Agencies Serving the Blind, Inc.

Florida Council of the Blind  
Florida Lions Conklin Center for the Blind  
ForSight Vision  
Georgia 2020  
Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation  
Greater Wilkes-Barre Association for the Blind  
Guide Dog Users, Inc.  
Guide Dogs of Hawaii  
Guiding Eyes for the Blind  
Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Healthy Eyes Alliance  
Helen Keller International  
Honolulu District School Visual Impairment Program  
Houston Health Department  
Houston Health Foundation  
Illinois College of Optometry  
Illinois Society for the Prevention of Blindness  
Independence for the Blind  
International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness  
International Eye Foundation  
International Retinal Research Foundation  
John Moran Eye Center  
Kansas Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons  
Keystone Blind Association  
Lackawanna Association for the Blind  
Lavelle Fund for the Blind  
Lighthouse Guild  
Lighthouse Louisiana  
Macula Vision Research Foundation  
Macular Degeneration Partnership  
Macular Degeneration Support  
Missouri Council of the Blind  
Montgomery County (PA) Association for the Blind  
National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research  
National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health at Prevent Blindness  
National Keratoconus Foundation  
Nationwide Children's Hospital  
Nevada Council of the Blind  
New England College of Optometry  
New England Eye Center, Tufts Medical Center  
NOAH - National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation

North Central Sight Services  
Northgate Eye Center  
NuVisions Center  
NYISE  
Ohio Public Health Association  
Opticians Association of Ohio  
Pennsylvania Association for the Blind  
Pennsylvania College of Optometry/Salus University  
Pennsylvania Council of the Blind  
Perkins School for the Blind  
Prevent Blindness  
Prevent Blindness Georgia  
Prevent Blindness Iowa  
Prevent Blindness North Carolina  
Prevent Blindness Northeast Region  
Prevent Blindness Northern California  
Prevent Blindness Texas  
Prevent Blindness Wisconsin  
Prevent Blindness, Ohio Affiliate  
Reader's Digest Partners for Sight Foundation  
Red Rose Council of the Blind  
Research to Prevent Blindness  
River Region Vision Source  
San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind  
Script Your Future Alabama  
SEE International  
Seva Foundation  
Shiley Eye Institute, University of California San Diego  
Sight Center of Northwest Pennsylvania  
Sight Savers America  
SKB  
South Central Blind Association  
State University of New York College of Optometry  
Tennessee Council of the Blind  
That Man May See  
The Vision Council  
UAB Vision Science Research Center  
University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Optometry  
University of Houston College of Optometry  
University of Pikeville, Kentucky College of Optometry  
UPMC (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center)

Utah Councils of the Blind  
UTMB Galveston  
Venago County (PA) Association for the Blind  
Virginia Tech Advanced Research Institute  
VisionCorps  
Vision 2020 USA  
Vision Forward Association  
Vision Resource Center of Berks County (PA)  
Vision Resources of Central Pennsylvania  
Vision Source  
VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
VisionServe Alliance  
Visually Impaired Persons Support (VIPS)  
Washington-Greene County (PA) Blind Association  
Westmoreland County (PA) Blind Association  
West Virginia University Eye Institute  
Wills Eye Hospital  
Wyoming Council of the Blind