

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 27, 2017

Dear Colleague:

As the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress begins consideration of fiscal year 2018 (FY18) appropriations bills, we- the co-chairs of the Congressional Vision Caucus- are asking for your support of prevention and research programs to reduce vision loss and eye disorders in the U.S. The financial impact of vision problems in our country is currently calculated at \$145 billion in direct medical costs. Estimates project that the number of people living with legal blindness will increase to 2 million by 2050 and best-corrected visual impairment will double to 6.95 million. Without significant planning and intervention, and anticipating an aging population and shifting demographics, the financial impact could rise to as much as \$717 billion by 2050.

Eyesight and vision are foundational to a child's success in school and an adult's employability and sustained success. Vision impairment and blindness are highly feared but most vision loss can be prevented with improved access to health care and early detection. Yet for every \$37,720 spent on vision problems in our country, only \$1 is currently allocated towards prevention.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) recognized that vision and eye health have not received the attention and investment they warrant given their importance to public health. In response, NASEM issued a set of policy recommendations in its report *Making Eye Health a Population Health Imperative: A Vision for Tomorrow* that directly call for federal government action.

**Specifically, the NASEM recommendations include:**

- 1. Motivating nationwide action toward achieving a reduction in the burden of vision impairment across the United States**
- 2. Coordinating a public awareness campaign to promote policies and practices which encourages lifelong eye and vision health, reduces vision impairment, and promotes health equity**
- 3. Creating an interagency workgroup to develop grant programs that target the leading causes, consequences, and unmet needs of vision health and impairment**
- 4. Convening a panel to develop a single set of evidence-based clinical and rehabilitation practice guidelines and measures that can be used by eye care professionals, medical care providers, and public health professionals to prevent, screen for, detect, monitor, diagnose, and treat eye and vision problems**
- 5. Developing a coordinated surveillance system for eye and vision health in the United States**
- 6. Building state and local public health capacity by prioritizing and expanding the CDC's vision grant program in partnership with state-based programs and stakeholders**

The NASEM report also acknowledges the important—yet underfunded—roles of the Vision Health Initiative at the CDC, the National Eye Institute (NEI) at the NIH, and the National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health program at Prevent Blindness (which is partly funded through HRSA) as leading examples of the importance of quality improvement in advancing population health. The report in its entirety can be found [here](#).

As we move through the FY18 appropriations process, we ask you to consider the NASEM's recommendations. We encourage your support of resources for existing adult vision programs at the CDC, advanced eye health research at the NIH, and specific pediatric eye health needs addressed through HRSA grants. It is imperative that we address the incoming tide of vision problems facing our nation.

If you have any questions, please contact Nora Blalock with Rep. David Price ([nora.blalock@mail.house.gov](mailto:nora.blalock@mail.house.gov)), Emanuel Saavedra with Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen ([emanuel.saavedra@mail.house.gov](mailto:emanuel.saavedra@mail.house.gov)), Kristen O'Neill with Rep. Gene Green ([kristen.oneill@mail.house.gov](mailto:kristen.oneill@mail.house.gov)), or Taryn Vieweger with Rep. Steve Stivers ([taryn.vieweger@mail.house.gov](mailto:taryn.vieweger@mail.house.gov)).

Sincerely,



David E. Price  
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