



Prevent Blindness calls upon Congress to fund programs in Fiscal Year 2022 that prevent blindness and preserve sight

Vision impairments will cost the United States **\$177 billion in 2021** with national expenditures **projected to top \$717 billion by 2050**. Vision impairments and eye disease often contribute to or are complicated by other serious and chronic health conditions, including diabetes, stroke, depression, social isolation, cognitive decline, and falls-related injuries or death. As we have learned during the global pandemic, several of these conditions are analogous to the most serious consequences of COVID-19 with early surveillance data from the CDC indicating that **30% of COVID-19 patients had diabetes** and **4.8% had a neurologic or neurodevelopmental disability (including visual impairment)**. Lack of mobility, decreased independence, barriers in accessing care, longer hospitalization and readmission, need for long-term care, and decreased ability to self-manage health conditions are all equally serious consequences of vision problems.

*Despite how vision enables many aspects of our daily lives, and despite the tremendous cost of vision problems, for every \$18,600 spent on vision problems, **only a single federal dollar** is allocated toward early detection and prevention programs at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and innovation and research at the National Eye Institute.*

Congress can help Americans protect our national vision and eye health by:

Allocating \$5 million to the CDC's Vision and Eye Health program to conduct national-level surveillance of vision loss and eye disease

Vision loss prevention and eye health promotion efforts at the CDC's Vision Health Initiative (VHI) rely on surveillance, epidemiology, and applied public health research. Prevalence data is used to develop and integrate public health practices and policies through state and community health programs and partnerships. However, due to consistent underfunding of our national public health system, the VHI has been unable to collect visual health data since 2008. **Consequently, our best available national-level data on vision loss and eye disease is nearly 15 years old.** National-level data on vision loss and eye disease is urgently needed – particularly in light of such trends as our rapidly aging population, the rise of chronic disease rates, major shifts in our national population demographics, and disparities in access across racial and ethnic populations, low-income communities, and underserved or rural areas. This critical investment in vision and eye health data will strengthen state and community capacity to develop partnerships around early detection and intervention, and raise awareness of vision while informing ongoing pandemic and future public health emergency responses.

Maintaining \$4 million to the CDC for glaucoma detection and prevention

Glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness for people aged 60 years and older. Early detection and treatment are cost-effective and fundamental approaches to slowing glaucoma progression and preserving remaining vision.

This funding will allow the CDC to continue glaucoma detection, referral, and sustained treatment through cooperative and cost-effective public-private partnerships and innovative outreach and service delivery projects that have successfully reached high-risk and underserved populations.