

March 10, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
United States Senate  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education  
and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Ranking Member  
United States Senate  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education  
and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20510

As you develop the Senate’s Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations legislation for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, we—the 116 undersigned organizations that represent patients and consumers, public health professionals, providers, and community service providers across the vision and eye health spectrum—urge you to appropriate **\$5 million to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)’s Vision and Eye Health program and \$4 million for Glaucoma**. This funding would allow the CDC to conduct critically needed national surveillance of devastating eye diseases and conditions, determine where gaps in access to care exist, and partner with states and communities to improve vision and eye health at the state, local, or systems level.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed<sup>1</sup> where the circumstances that lead to vision loss and eye disease—such as the presence of chronic disease, disparities across such populations as those belonging to diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic circumstances, and age—intersect with the novel coronavirus and its most serious consequences. Vision impairments and eye disease often contribute to or are complicated by other serious and costly chronic health conditions, including diabetes, stroke, depression, social isolation, cognitive decline, and injuries related to falls. Access to quality, preventive eye care that can help detect sight-threatening eye disease for underserved communities and high-risk populations was fractured before the pandemic. Vision problems will likely worsen as children, working-age adults, and the elderly have been unable or felt unsafe to access preventive care during the pandemic.

Vision impairments will cost the United States \$177 billion in 2021<sup>2</sup>. **Absent investments in vision and eye health as a public health priority, these costs will increase to \$717 billion by 2050.** The CDC addresses our national vision impairment and eye disease burden by conducting public health surveillance, research, and evidence-based public health interventions designed to complement state and community health efforts. Data from the most reliable surveillance and epidemiological tool available—the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES)—is critical to the CDC. The data generated from this survey allows the CDC to track state-level data on vision loss and eye disease, evaluate variances across subgroups and demographics, and implement findings into evidence-based, strategic public health interventions to deploy at the state and community level.

Allocating \$5 million for Vision and Eye Health will enable the CDC to utilize NHANES once again so that vision health stakeholders have the information they need to protect the sight of millions of Americans. Due to consistent underfunding of our national public health system, infrastructure, and capacity, the CDC has not been able to collect reliable prevalence data of vision impairment and eye disease since 2005 – 2008. **Consequently, our best available data on our national vision loss and eye disease burden is nearly 15 years old with interventions based on data that dates back as far as**

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<sup>1</sup> Coronavirus Disease 2019 Case Surveillance — United States, January 22–May 30, 2020  
[https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6924e2.htm?s\\_cid=mm6924e2\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6924e2.htm?s_cid=mm6924e2_w)

<sup>2</sup> “The Future of Vision: Forecasting the Prevalence and Costs of Vision Problems.” NORC University of Chicago (2014)

**1999.** We cannot respond to the needs of patients who are living with blinding eye disease, low vision, or vision loss using data that predates such trends as our rapidly aging population, skyrocketing rates of chronic disease, new stresses to our eye health such as technology, and rising costs of health care. We urge you to make this critical and timely investment in our vision and eye health.

Additionally, \$4 million allocated to the CDC's glaucoma program in FY 2022 will allow efforts on glaucoma detection, referral, and sustained treatment to continue through cooperative and cost-effective public-private partnerships and innovative outreach and service delivery projects that have successfully reached high-risk and underserved populations. Glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness for people aged 60 years and older. Today, our nation spends more than \$6 billion annually on the disease **with costs projected to rise to \$12 billion per year by 2032 at which time nearly 4.3 million people will face the disease.** In the early stages, glaucoma has no symptoms or noticeable vision loss; however, by the time symptoms or vision loss appears, permanent damage to the eye may have already occurred and vision lost cannot be restored. Public education, early detection, and treatment are cost-effective and fundamental approaches to slowing the progression of glaucoma and preserving remaining vision.

Our nation needs coordinated interventions that support key stakeholders and state-based public health systems to expand early detection, prevention, patient support, and research to lessen the burden of vision disorders on working adults and America's public health infrastructure. We urge the Senate to reinvest in the CDC's Vision and Eye Health program, and restore its work in surveillance and maintain the CDC's work in glaucoma so that Americans can look forward to a lifetime of healthy vision and eyesight. If you have any questions, please contact Sara Brown at [sbrown@preventblindness.org](mailto:sbrown@preventblindness.org).

Sincerely,

ACB Government Employees  
ACB of Minnesota  
ACB Radio Amateurs affiliate  
Alliance for Aging Research  
American Academy of Ophthalmology  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus  
American Council of the Blind  
American Council of the Blind of Connecticut  
American Council of the Blind Diabetics in Action  
American Council of the Blind of Indiana  
American Council of the Blind of Maryland  
The American Council of the Blind of New York, Inc.  
American Council of the Blind Next Generation  
American Council of the Blind of Ohio  
American Council of the Blind of Texas, Inc.  
American Glaucoma Society  
American Macular Degeneration Foundation  
American Optometric Association  
American Society of Retina Specialists  
Arkansas Council of the Blind  
Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired SC  
Association of Diabetes Care & Education Specialists  
Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO)  
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO)  
Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology

Austin Lighthouse  
Bay State Council of the Blind  
Beyond Vision  
Blinded Veterans Association  
Bluegrass Council Of The Blind, Inc.  
CABVI  
California Agencies for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CAABVI)  
California Council of the Blind  
CCABVI - Chester County Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
CCVIB (Colorado Council of the Visually Impaired & Blind.)  
Center of Vision Enhancement  
The Central Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Children's Vision Massachusetts  
Community Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Department of Ophthalmology, UNC Chapel Hill  
Envision Inc  
Essilor Vision Foundation  
EyeSight Foundation of Alabama  
Florida Agencies Serving the Blind  
Florida Council of the Blind  
Georgia Council of the Blind  
Georgia Eye Bank  
The Golden Triangle Council Of The Blind  
Greater Louisville Council of the Blind  
Guide Dogs for the Blind  
Foundation Fighting Blindness  
Hadley  
Hawaii Association of the Blind  
I.E. Lighthouse for the Blind  
Illinois assistive Technology Program  
ILLINOIS COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY  
Illinois council of the Blind  
Illinois Society for the Prevention of Blindness  
Iowa Council of the United Blind  
Kansas Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Kansas School Nurses Organization  
Kansas Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons  
Kentucky Council of Citizens with Low Vision  
Kentucky Council of the Blind  
Lighthouse for the Blind & Low Vision  
Lighthouse Central Florida  
Lighthouse Louisiana  
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.  
Michigan Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Minnesota Christian Fellowship of the Blind  
Missouri Council Of The Blind  
Mountain State Council of the Blind  
Naples Lions` Club  
National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research  
National Association of Chronic Disease Directors  
National Association of School Nurses

National Caucus and Center on Black Aging, Inc.  
National Optometric Association  
New Jersey Council of the Blind  
New York Vision Rehabilitation Association  
North Carolina Council of the Blind, Inc.  
North Central Sight Services  
North Dakota Association of the Blind  
Oklahoma Council of the Blind  
OneSight  
Opticians Association of America  
Perkins School for the Blind  
Pennsylvania Council of the Blind  
Prevent Blindness  
Prevent Blindness Georgia  
Prevent Blindness Iowa  
Prevent Blindness North Carolina  
Prevent Blindness, Ohio Affiliate  
Prevent Blindness Texas  
Prevent Blindness Wisconsin  
Prevention of Blindness Society of Metropolitan Washington  
San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind  
San Diego Center for the Blind  
Society for the Blind, Sacramento, CA  
South Dakota Association of the Blind  
Spectrios Institute for Low Vision  
Support Alliance of the Visually Impaired (SAVI)  
University Of Illinois College of Medicine at Peoria, Division of Pediatric Ophthalmology  
Valley Center for the Blind  
Vision Health Advocacy Coalition  
VisionCorps  
Vision Forward Association  
Vision Impact Institute  
VisionServe Alliance  
VOLUNTEER OPTOMETRIC SERVICE FOR HUMANITY WI CHAPTER  
VOSH California  
VOSH/International  
VOSH Iowa  
The Washington Council of the Blind  
Wayfinder Family Services