



# Seeing the Way to Better Health: *Brain Health and Vision Health*

Vision impairment and cognitive impairment are issues that disproportionately affect older adults, individuals with chronic disease, minority populations, individuals living in poverty, the uninsured and underinsured, and those with less than a high school education.<sup>1,2</sup> It is critical that programs addressing cognitive health consider the impact of co-occurring vision and cognitive impairment on functional abilities and quality of life.<sup>3</sup> Because vision health represents a potentially modifiable risk factor for cognitive impairment and a potential contributor to the functional toll of cognitive impairment, attention to vision health is an important aspect of public health and cognitive health programs.

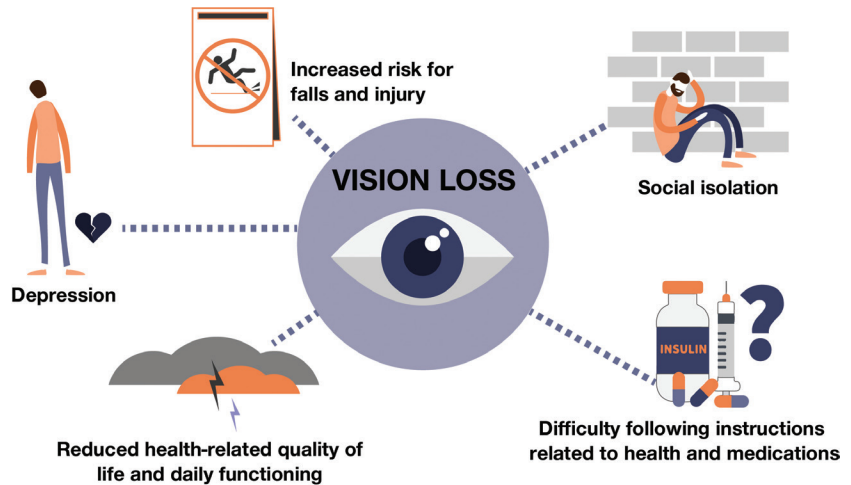
## What is cognitive impairment?

Cognitive impairment is when a person has trouble remembering, learning new things, concentrating, or making decisions that affect their everyday life. With mild impairment, people often notice changes in cognitive functions but are still able to perform everyday activities. Severe levels of impairment can lead to losing the ability to understand the meaning or importance of something and the ability to talk or write, resulting in the inability to live independently.<sup>8</sup>

## What is vision impairment?

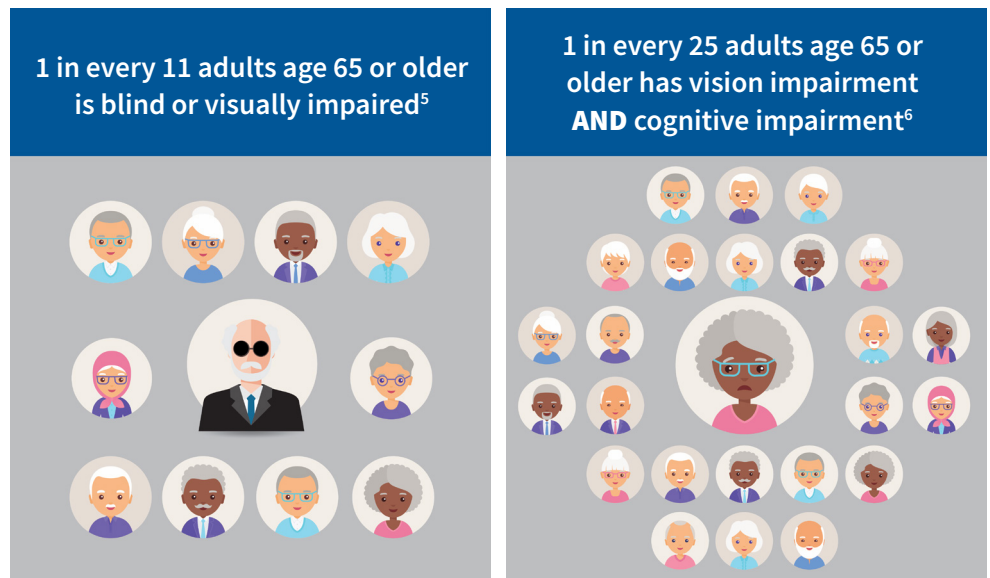
Vision impairment is a measure of the type and severity of limitations in vision, including blindness. Vision impairment can range from mild impairments in visual acuity to total blindness (no light perception). Vision impairment must be managed over the lifespan to maintain the activities of daily living. With proper training, equipment, and accommodations, people with uncorrectable vision impairment can lead independent, productive, joyful lives. However, many individuals do not receive the resources they need to overcome vision-related disability.<sup>4</sup>

## Vision loss can lead to adverse health consequences<sup>4</sup>:



Ensuring individuals with cognitive impairment are treated for correctable vision impairment with surgery and/or eye glasses is critical. Individuals with cognitive impairment and uncorrectable vision impairment may benefit from vision rehabilitation services to improve vision-related and cognitive function.<sup>7</sup>

## Common issues in older adult health:



**INTEGRATING vision and eye health strategies into other programs and activities can help improve quality of life for people with cognitive impairment.**

### BRAIN HEALTH CAMPAIGNS:



Integrate messaging about vision and eye health into programs that promote brain health to various populations, including those at high risk and minority populations. Prevention messaging can include knowing family history of eye health, eating healthy, maintaining healthy weight, wearing protective eyewear, not smoking, washing hands before removing contact lens, and practicing workplace eye safety.<sup>3</sup>

### HEALTHY AGING PROGRAMS:



Integrate vision screening and early detection activities, improve access and utilization of eye care services, and incorporate eye health awareness messages into programs that promote healthy and active aging.

### CAREGIVER

#### SUPPORT PROGRAMS:



Support caregivers by providing them with vision and eye health resources. These resources should include measures to prevent vision loss by receiving recommended eye care services.<sup>3</sup> They should also include contact information for low vision rehabilitation programs to assist those with uncorrectable vision impairment.

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPEMENT ACTIVITIES:



In training programs for professionals who promote cognitive health or work with patients with cognitive impairment, include information about seeking care for the treatable forms of vision impairment such as cataracts and refractive errors. In addition, add content around managing other age-related eye conditions like age-related macular degeneration, diabetes-related retinopathy, and glaucoma.<sup>3</sup>

### RESOURCES:

#### **Building Public Health Capacity to Enhance Vision and Eye Health: A Toolkit for Public Health Agencies and Their Partners**

This toolkit can help public health agencies and their partners assess the level of vision impairment in their communities, build effective partnerships, and implement effective and sustainable interventions to improve vision and eye health. [www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/programs/vision-eye-health-tool.html](http://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/programs/vision-eye-health-tool.html)

#### **Healthy Eyes Presentation Series**

This presentation series can build awareness about eye and vision basics, common adult vision disorders, eye safety precautions and proactive behaviors for a lifetime of healthy vision. In addition, there are disease specific toolkits on the Prevent Blindness website. [preventblindness.org/health-eyes-presentation-series/](http://preventblindness.org/health-eyes-presentation-series/)

### **Healthy Brain Initiative: State and Local Public Health Partnerships to Address Dementia, The 2018-2023 Road Map**

This road map outlines how state and local public health agencies and their partners can continue to promote cognitive health, address cognitive impairment for people living in the community, and help meet the needs of caregivers.

[www.cdc.gov/aging/healthybrain/roadmap.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/aging/healthybrain/roadmap.htm)

#### **Living Well with Low Vision**

This online resource educates those with loss of vision on how to maintain their independence and quality of life. [lowvision.preventblindness.org/](http://lowvision.preventblindness.org/)

#### **Resources for Health Educators**

These toolkits offer disease- and audience-specific programs for health educators. [www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/resources-for-health-educators](http://www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/resources-for-health-educators)

#### **Vision and Eye Health Surveillance System (VEHSS): A National Data System for Vision and Eye Health**

Get the latest state and national data on vision and eye health. [www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/vehss/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/vehss/index.html)

**For more information:** [www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org)

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### REFERENCES

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