



**Prevent Blindness America  
Public Policy Agenda  
111<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session**

Prevent Blindness America (PBA), the nation's leading non-profit, voluntary organization committed to preventing blindness and preserving sight, maintains a long-standing commitment to working with policymakers at all levels of government, organizations and individuals in the eye care and vision loss community, and other interested stakeholders to develop, advance, and implement policies and programs that prevent blindness and preserve sight. To that end, PBA stands ready to work with the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress and the Obama Administration to:

- Advance and expand public health efforts to promote eye health and prevent eye disease, vision loss, and blindness.
- Ensure comprehensive vision care for all Americans.

**Advancing and Expanding Public Health Efforts to Promote  
Eye Health and Prevent Eye Disease, Vision Loss, and Blindness**

PBA urges Congress to provide much-needed increased resources to improve our nation's efforts to understand, identify, treat, and prevent vision loss, blindness, and eye disease. Therefore, PBA calls upon Congress in fiscal year (FY) 2010 to:

- Support the implementation of the findings of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) report, "Improving the Nation's Vision Health: A Coordinated Public Health Approach." This includes support for increased public and health professional awareness of eye disease and vision loss, implementation of vision loss prevention interventions, with a focus on addressing health care disparities, and targeting of individuals most at-risk for vision loss and the health professionals most likely to encounter them. Specifically, PBA advocates that CDC receive:
  - \$4.5 million to sustain and expand its efforts to address the growing public health threat of preventable vision loss among older Americans, low-income, and underserved populations.
  - Increased funding to support eye disease surveillance and evaluation systems, to ensure our nation has much-needed epidemiological data regarding overall burden and high-risk populations, so we can formulate and evaluate strategies to prevent and reduce the economic and social costs associated with vision loss and eye diseases.
- Support the further inclusion and improved tracking of vision objectives in Healthy People 2020.
- Provide \$10 billion to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), with \$711 million for the National Eye Institute (NEI), to bolster efforts to identify the underlying causes of eye disease and vision loss, improve early detection and diagnosis of eye disease and vision loss, and advance prevention and treatment efforts.
- Maintain "Peer Reviewed Vision Research" as a dedicated line item within the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) and increase its funding to \$10 million.

- Designate \$6.5 million to fund the Military Vision Center of Excellence and Eye Trauma Injury Registry.

### **Ensuring Comprehensive Vision Care for All Americans**

Vision related conditions affect people across the lifespan from childhood through elder years. As such, regular preventive eye care can identify vision problems at the earliest and most treatable stage – saving sight and saving money. The key to preventing and reducing vision loss and blindness – and the associated economic and social impact on our nation – is early detection through eye examinations and vision screenings. Unfortunately, too many Americans do not have access to the vision and eye care benefits and services they need and deserve. PBA believes that all Americans should have coverage and access to comprehensive vision care – which is composed of the full-range of diagnostic, preventative, and treatment benefits and services, including regular eye examinations and vision screenings, necessary surgery, prescription therapies, corrective eyewear, and low vision services. Therefore, PBA urges Congress to:

- Include comprehensive vision care in any minimum benefits package or required services provided for in national health reform legislation.
- Incorporate comprehensive vision care into all federally funded health plans and programs.
- Ensure co-payments and deductibles for vision care under public and private health plans are the same as for other covered health care benefits and services.

### **Children**

Fortunately, in children, many serious ocular conditions – such as amblyopia, nearsightedness, farsightedness, and astigmatism – are treatable if diagnosed at an early stage. Yet, only an estimated 14% of children receive comprehensive eye examinations before entering kindergarten or first grade; less than 50% of children receive a vision screening in pediatric offices; and only 21% of preschool age children are screened for vision problems. To address this disparity, PBA urges Congress to:

- Provide additional resources to the Medicaid program to ensure that states will preserve and/or extend coverage for – and access to – vision care for individuals covered under Medicaid and/or the State Children’s Health Insurance Programs (SCHIP) that are blended with state Medicaid programs.
- Extend the Medicaid model of vision care under the Early and Periodic, Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) provision to SCHIP.
- Support efforts of the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Bureau, within the Health Resources and Services Administration, to develop and implement a nation-wide core vision-related reporting item for a state Title V core performance measure related to vision screening.
- Support initiatives within the Head Start program to ensure that all Head Start enrollees receive a vision screening and that such screenings are provided in a manner that promotes consistency and quality in protocol and administration.
- Support the enactment of the Vision Care for Kids Act of 2009 – bipartisan legislation that will help ensure children have much-needed access to vision care.
- Incorporate vision screening into the school-readiness initiatives under No Child Left Behind.

**Medicare Beneficiaries: Older Americans and Individuals with Disabilities**

The NEI reports that “the number of Americans with age-related eye disease and the vision impairment that results is expected to double within the next three decades.” Given that the risk of vision loss increases significantly with age, and vision problems contribute to a host of health problems, particularly among those 65 and older, PBA urges Congress to:

- Strengthen the meaningfulness of the Welcome to Medicare benefit by: (1) incorporating the currently recommended visual acuity test into the review of functional ability and level of safety components of the initial preventive physical examination (IPPE), and (2) providing covered referral to an eye care professional for examination of any suspected vision problems identified during the IPPE vision acuity test, not just those concerns related to diabetic retinopathy or glaucoma.
- Expand Medicare coverage for eye examinations, glaucoma tests, eyeglasses, and contact lenses to all beneficiaries, as the risk for glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration (AMD), and other eye diseases and vision problems greatly increase with age.