

## 2. Does vision loss contribute a large burden in terms of quality of life, and cost?

Yes. People with vision loss are more likely to report depression, diabetes, hearing impairment, and premature death. Decreased ability to see often leads to the inability to drive, read, keep up with unfamiliar places, thus substantially compromising quality of life. The cost of vision loss, including productivity, is estimated to exceed \$35 billion (Rein, Zhang, Wirth, et al., 2006)

## 3. Has vision loss recently increased and will it increase

Yes. As the population of older people continues to accelerate, the number of people experiencing vision loss is increasing. And as the population of people experiencing diabetes increases, consequent increases in diabetic retinopathy and other eye diseases. Prevent Blindness America estimates that the population of people with blindness and visual impairment will double by 2030 unless corrective actions are taken.

## 4. Is vision loss perceived to be a threat by the public?

Yes. Vision loss ranks among the top ten causes of disability in the United States, and it is a concern for many people.

## 5. Is it feasible to act on vision loss at a community or population level?

Yes. Scientific evidence shows that early detection and treatment can prevent much blindness and vision loss. Efficacious and cost-effective strategies to detect and treat diabetic retinopathy are available, but for people with diabetes, screening is received only by about two-thirds of persons for whom the exam is recommended. Cataract removal surgery can restore vision, and this success is achieved significantly across health care settings. However, among African Americans, unoperated senile cataracts remain a major cause of blindness. Glaucoma, if detected and controlled, and vision loss stopped by early detection and treatment. Nevertheless, half the people with glaucoma are not diagnosed, and glaucoma is still the number one blinding disease among African Americans.

Public health serves to address each of these questions by conducting population-based investigations of the population, characteristics, circumstances, and trends of vision loss, as well as developing and implementing cost-effective interventions to assure access to vision care and health behaviors to prevent the loss of vision and improve the health and quality of life for those who have lost vision.

Several thoughtful papers have articulated public health dimensions of vision loss. These include:

Saaddine JB, Venkat Narayan KM, Vinicor F. Vision Loss: A Public Health Problem? *Ophthalmology*

