Recognizing the Decade of Vision 2010-2020

By Hand Delivery -- June 30, 2014

The Honorable Jack Kingston, Chair, LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
2372 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kingston:

I am writing to update you about the latest forecast regarding the prevalence and cost of vision problems in the United States. The National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (NAEVR) is concerned that these dramatically higher cost forecasts come at a time when research funding at the National Eye Institute (NEI) and vision loss prevention funding at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Vision Health Initiative has been reduced due to flat funding, sequester cuts, and lack of inflationary increases.

On June 18, NAEVR member Prevent Blindness released a new report The Future of Vision: Forecasting Prevalence and Costs of Vision Problems, prepared by the University of Chicago. Top-line results are attached.

The report updates the annual cost of vision disorders to $145 billion (up from the 2013 estimate of $139 billion). Most importantly, it estimates that these costs will grow by year 2050 to $373 billion (in 2014 dollars), which is $717 billion when corrected for inflation. By 2050, due to the aging of the population and its reliance on Medicare, the government will spend $154 billion, or 41 percent of the pre-inflation cost of $373 billion, for eye disorders.

The aging of the population is not the only driver of vision disorder-related costs. The report estimates a dramatic increase in the number of cases of diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma, primarily due to the growth of the Hispanic population, which has a disproportionately higher risk for these eye diseases.

Adequately funding vision research and vision loss prevention programs now will save money in the future, as well as ensure productivity, independence, and quality of life.

Sincerely,

James F. Jorkasky, Executive Director
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cc: Allison Myers, John Bartrum

Attachment: Forecasting the Prevalence and Costs of Vision Problems