**HEALTHY AGING MONTH**

**AEVR Releases Attitudinal Survey, Vision and Blindness Fact Sheet**

The Release Panel (identified in image to right) discussed the survey findings and answered questions from the media and vision community.

AEVR released results of a new poll, *The Public's Attitudes about the Health and Economic Impact of Vision Loss and Eye Disease and a new Vision and Blindness fact sheet* at a September 18 National Press Club event in Washington, D.C.

The poll, commissioned by Research!America and conducted by Zogby Analytics, was sponsored by a grant from Research to Prevent Blindness (RPB). The poll, the most rigorous conducted to-date of attitudes about vision and vision loss among ethnic and racial groups including non-Hispanic Whites, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans found, in part, that:

- A significant number of Americans across all racial lines rate losing their eyesight as having the greatest impact on their daily life, affecting independence, productivity, and quality of life.
- African Americans, when asked what disease or ailment is the worst that could happen, ranked blindness first, followed by HIV/AIDS. Hispanics and Asians ranked cancer first and blindness second, while non-Hispanic Whites ranked Alzheimer's disease first, followed by blindness.
- A significant number across all racial lines were aware of the impact of genetics on vision and the impact of lifestyle factors, such as excessive sunlight/UV radiation. Fewer were aware of other lifestyle factors, such as obesity and smoking.
- Knowledge about specific eye diseases was uneven. More than half of all groups had heard of cataracts and glaucoma but fewer were aware of diabetic eye disease and AMD.
- America’s minority populations are united in the view that not only is eye and vision research very important and needs to be a national priority, but many feel that the current annual federal funding of $2.10 per-person, per-year is not enough and should be increased.

The new *Vision and Blindness* fact sheet includes current eye disorder prevalence and cost data, as well as that projected to year 2050, derived from recent studies conducted by Prevent Blindness. It also presents the latest NEI-funded breakthrough vision research. Paul D’Addario, who was blinded by Retinitis Pigmentosa, offers a patient perspective, as he wears an Argus II Retinal Prosthesis that enables him to see flashes of light that his brain translates into outlines of objects.

**Private funding foundation RPB led the national advocacy that resulted in Congress creating the NEI as a free-standing institute within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 1968. RPB also conducted the first-ever attitudinal survey on vision and vision loss in 1965, in that and subsequent updates in 1976 and 1988 found that the public consistently identified fear of vision loss as second only to fear of cancer. With release of the most recent polling data fifty years after the first study, it is clear that vision loss is top-of-mind among most Americans with respect to their quality of life.**

**From left:** Arthur Makar (Fight for Sight), Jeff Todd (Prevent Blindness, and a member of the AEVR Working Group) and Sandra Blackwood (International Retinal Research Foundation)

**Left to right:** Karla Zadnik, O.D., Ph.D. (Ohio State University College of Optometry), James Tsai, M.D. (New York Eye and Ear Infirmary /Mount Sinai Health System), NEI Director Paul Sieving, M.D., Ph.D., Neil Bressler, M.D. (Wilmer Eye Institute/Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and moderator Michelle Miller (CBS News)

The Release Panel members, moderated by CBS News Correspondent Michelle Miller, provided their perspectives on study results and responded to questions from the media and the vision community, which resulted in discussion about the impact of federal funding cuts—especially on young investigators, the latest NEI-funded research to address major eye diseases, the role of private philanthropy and industry, and the importance of individuals taking responsibility for their own eye health (e.g., compliance with medication, awareness of lifestyle impact). Selected pull quotes from the discussion include:

**Dr. Bressler:**
“We knew in the 1990s from patients engaged in NEI-funded clinical studies on AMD and Diabetic Retinopathy how much they value their vision. This latest study confirms that value along all racial lines. It also confirms that we still have much to do to get the word out about eye disease.”

**Dr. Sieving:**
“We are now in a new space in eye care where there are solutions. But about half of patients with these diseases do not know they have them. NEI’s National Eye Health Education Program (NEHEP) will continue its eye health education awareness, tailoring unique messages to specific ethnic communities at risk for eye disease.”

**Dr. Tsai:**
“We can now give hope to patients who previously had no hope. Although the federal investment in the NEI provides seed funding for potential breakthroughs, we need private philanthropy and industry to invest and enable those opportunities to ‘explode’ into exciting new therapies for patients.”

**Dr. Zadnik:**
“To accomplish research, we need the best and brightest. This year, since a training grant was not available from NEI due to budget cuts, Ohio State self-funded our annual summer program to interest young optometry students in research. We feel that this is an investment with high pay-off.”

*Watch the Release Panel video and get the study results and fact sheet at www.eyeresearch.org*