2009 GENDER AND EYE HEALTH FACT SHEET

About 314 million people around the world are visually impaired and 45 million of them are blind.

Nearly two out of three people who are blind or visually impaired are women and girls.

75% of visual impairment are preventable or correctable.

UNITED STATES

- Of the 3.6 million Americans age 40 and older who are visually impaired, 2.3 million are women.

- Of the four major eye diseases, women outnumber men in every category*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EYE DISEASE</th>
<th>TOTAL # OF CASES IN AMERICA</th>
<th>TOTAL # OF WOMEN'S CASES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age-related Macular Degeneration</td>
<td>2,074,761</td>
<td>1,367,365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cataract</td>
<td>22,325,926</td>
<td>13,699,339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glaucoma</td>
<td>2,290,846</td>
<td>1,388,698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetic Retinopathy</td>
<td>4,482,885</td>
<td>2,300,979</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on data from the 2008 updated version of the Vision Problems in the U.S. report from Prevent Blindness America and the National Eye Institute for Americans ages 40 and older.

- Risk factors for premature death due to heart disease or cancer are the same as those for blindness and vision impairment. These factors include, smoking; excess weight; imbalanced, unhealthy diet; lack of exercise and exposure to UV rays.

- It is estimated that the total annual costs associated with adult vision problems in the United States at $51.4 billion.

GLOBALLY

- About 87% of the world’s visually impaired live in developing countries.

- In many countries, men’s access to eye health care is twice that of women, due in part to economic status.

- Some eye diseases are intrinsically more common in women. Dry Eye Syndrome is more prevalent in women and, women are at a higher risk of autoimmune diseases that may affect they eye.
VISION LOSS IN THE USA

With the aging of the population, the number of Americans with major eye diseases is increasing, and vision loss is becoming a major public health problem. By the year 2020, the number of people who are blind or have low vision is projected to increase substantially. Blindness or low vision affects 3.3 million Americans age 40 and over, or one in 28. This figure is projected to reach 5.5 million by the year 2020. The study reports that low vision and blindness increase significantly with age, particularly in people over age 65. People 80 years of age and older currently make up eight percent of the population, but account for 69 percent of blindness. The study provides the most robust and up-to-date estimates available of the burden of visual impairment. It was sponsored by the National Eye Institute (NEI), part of the Federal government’s National Institutes of Health (NIH).

CAUSES OF VISION LOSS IN THE U.S.

The study identifies age-related macular degeneration (AMD), glaucoma, cataract, and diabetic retinopathy as the most common eye diseases in Americans age 40 and over. The leading cause of blindness among white Americans is AMD, accounting for 54 percent of all blindness. Among African Americans, the leading causes of blindness are cataract and glaucoma. Among Hispanics, glaucoma is the most common cause of blindness. The study authors emphasize the importance of annual comprehensive eye examinations in preventing and/or delaying eye disease for those at higher risk for blindness, such as those over age 65, people with diabetes, or African Americans over age 40.

U.S. CHILDREN AND VISION LOSS

Among children in the USA, blindness is still a problem. The leading causes are congenital abnormalities and retinopathy of prematurity. Children with blindness face 75 or more years of living without sight. Vision loss due to refractive error is increasing dramatically. By age 15, over 25% of children will need glasses. Many of these children who live in poverty will not be able to see the blackboard because they cannot get a pair of glasses.

TOTAL COST OF VISION LOSS

It is estimated the total cost to the nation for preventable vision loss exceeds $51 billion per year. Many of the causes of blindness can be prevented or treated.

For more information:
www.preventblindness.org
www.nei.nih.gov

VISION LOSS ON A GLOBAL SCALE

About 314 million people are visually impaired worldwide; 45 million of them are blind.

- Most people with visual impairment are older, and females are more at risk at every age, in every part of the world.
- The number of people blinded by infectious diseases has been greatly reduced, but age-related impairment is increasing.
- About 87% of the world’s visually impaired live in developing countries.
- Cataract remains the leading cause of blindness globally, except in the most developed countries.
- Correction of refractive errors could give normal vision to more than 12 million children (ages five to 15).
- About 85% of all visual impairment is avoidable globally.

Globally, the leading causes of blindness, in order of frequency, are:
- cataract (a clouding of the lens of the eye that impedes the passage of light)
- uncorrected refractive errors (near-sightedness, far-sightedness or astigmatism)
- glaucoma (a group of diseases that result in damage of the optic nerve)
- age-related macular degeneration (which involves the loss of a person’s central field of vision)

Women’s Vision Loss – About 82% of all people who are visually impaired are age 50 and older (although they represent only 19% of the world’s population). Studies consistently indicate that females have a significantly higher risk of being visually impaired than males, in every region of the world, and at all ages.

Children’s Vision Loss – Child blindness remains a significant problem globally. An estimated 1.4 million blind children below age 15 will live in blindness for many years. In addition, more than 12 million children ages five to 15 are visually impaired because of uncorrected refractive errors (near-sightedness, far-sightedness or astigmatism); conditions that could be easily diagnosed and corrected with glasses, contact lenses or refractive surgery.

Preventing Vision Loss – Globally, about 85% of all visual impairment and 75% of blindness could be prevented or cured worldwide. Cataract surgery is one of the most cost-effective treatments that can be offered in developing countries. It can allow people to increase their economic productivity by up to 1500% of the cost of the surgery during the first post-operative year. Worldwide, it is estimated that over $200 billion would be saved over the next ten years by implementing VISION 2020. The total cost for the program over that period would be between $2-4 billion, well worth the cost.

For more information:
www.v2020.org