



THE HIGH COST OF LOW VISION: The Evidence on Ageing and the Loss of Sight

Key Messages

Vision loss is no longer an inevitable part of the ageing process, as people can now age with strong, healthy vision.

- Innovations in diagnosis, biomedicine, nutrition, technology, and preventive care are keys toward maintaining good vision throughout the ageing process and across the life course.
- 80 percent of the causes of visual impairment globally are preventable.
- This is truly a transformation of ageing in the 21st century because it enables older adults to remain mobile, engaged, independent, and economically active.

Spending to prevent vision loss should be seen as an investment because it enables a socially and economically engaged ageing population.

- Investments in preventing vision loss will create cost savings for individuals, families, the community and health and social support systems.
- The opportunities brought by the ageing of the global population can only be captured if healthy vision becomes the standard in the 21st century.

Vision loss is one of the greatest barriers to healthy, active, and productive ageing. As the global population ages, rates of preventable vision loss are soaring.

- Shortly there will be more than 2 billion people over 60 years of age.
- 285 million people are visually impaired, including 39 million who are totally blind.
- Due to population ageing, more attention must be given to combating non-communicable age-related eye conditions like age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which is the leading cause of blindness for older people in the developed world.

Vision loss creates a “snowball effect,” which impacts not only the health and wellbeing of older people, but also their families, caregivers, and society at large.

- Older people who suffer from visual impairment are more likely to have problems with daily activities and mobility, as well as pain and discomfort, anxiety or depression.
- Roughly one-third of those with vision loss suffer from clinical depression – twice the rate among the general population of older adults – which also places heavy burdens on family members and caregivers.

The direct costs of visual impairment are astonishing, and the indirect costs add to the burden.

- Direct costs of vision impairment worldwide will reach a stunning \$2.8 trillion by 2020.
- Indirect costs will add another \$760 billion by 2020.

Measures to prevent vision loss are cost-effective and must be pursued with urgency.

- Spending on healthy vision as we age is an investment. For instance, one study found that preventive injections considerably improved vision for one-third of patients and saved costs by reducing further visits and procedures.
- Patients with vision loss have higher non-vision-related health costs, estimated to be between \$2,000 and \$4,500 per patient.

Healthy vision as we age is a global public health priority, which requires public attention and public policy changes.

- Preventive eye health must become central to public health policy.
- Public education and awareness programs on healthy vision are necessary to improve prevention, detection, and treatment options.
- Public and private payers should reimburse for healthy vision.
- Incentives to increase research and development are needed to drive innovative solutions for healthy vision.