

New International Federation on Ageing Report Declares Vision Loss No Longer an Inevitable Part of Ageing

Calls for Investments in Preventive Eye Health to Reduce Social and Economic Burdens of Vision Loss

New York, 7 February 2013 – The [International Federation on Ageing](#) (IFA) today released a new report describing the health, social and economic burdens of vision loss on a global society that is rapidly ageing. The report calls for increased public education and awareness programs, improved public policies and greater integration of preventive eye health interventions into public health systems.

The report, titled “[The High Cost of Low Vision: The Evidence on Ageing and the Loss of Sight](#),” highlights that vision loss is no longer an inevitable part of the ageing process, as people can now age with strong, healthy vision, given 21st-century innovations in diagnosis, biomedicine, nutrition, technology and preventive care.

“The economic implications are equally huge as we now have it in our grasp to delink vision loss from ageing, which will have great impact on active, productive and more enjoyable ageing. This shift in the traditional perception of ageing is truly transformative,” said Jane Barratt, BSc, MSc, PhD, Secretary General of the IFA. “As 80 percent of vision loss is preventable, it is our ethical responsibility and a public health imperative that we take action now.”

“As the 21st century's seminal challenge of population ageing leads to increasing prevalence of deteriorating vision, it brings about huge social, personal and economic consequences,” said Kathy Spahn, President and CEO of Helen Keller International. “This report is both timely and critical as a tool for raising awareness of and driving solutions for preventable vision loss, which can have a positive and profound impact on economic growth and the human condition.”

The over-60 population is expected to reach 2 billion by mid-century. As this cohort rapidly grows to become the largest population segment of many societies globally, rates of preventable vision loss are also soaring. Today, 285 million people around the world are visually impaired, including 39 million who are totally blind, and that number will explode without preventive measures. The direct costs of vision impairment worldwide are estimated to reach \$2.8 trillion by 2020, and the indirect costs will add another \$760 billion.

Further, vision loss creates a “snowball effect,” which can affect mobility and daily activities and often leads to depression, injury and the need for long-term care, resulting in healthcare and associated service costs. Vision loss and related health conditions in older adults also impacts families, caregivers and society at large. For instance, people with advanced age-related macular degeneration (AMD) have much lower rates of employment and significantly lower incomes than those without vision impairment.

“IFA’s report highlights the critical need for action and investment in preventive eye health,” said Francisco Rodriguez, MD, Retina and Vitreous Specialist and Scientific Director, Fundación Oftalmológica Nacional in Colombia. “Across the globe, new policies to improve the diagnosis,

management and care associated with preventable eye diseases – especially among ageing populations – will go a long way in alleviating the burdens triggered by age-related vision loss.”

“As millions around the world are living longer – bringing about increasing prevalence in visual impairments – global institutions, governments, the scientific and medical communities, payers, patient groups, NGOs and businesses must partner to find innovative solutions to treat and prevent vision loss – one of the greatest challenges of global population ageing,” said Dr. Kemal Malik, Head Global Development at Bayer Healthcare.

The report emphasizes that measures to prevent vision loss are cost-effective and calls for urgent attention in key areas:

- Integrating visual screening and other preventive eye-health interventions into public health practices for adults of all ages;
- Creating education and awareness programs that include vision-loss prevention, detection, and treatment regimens;
- Reimbursing both treatments and preventive eye health interventions to ensure positive impact on system-wide costs and support for future innovation;
- Developing and utilizing tele-health mechanisms to provide greater access to screening and treatment regardless of geographical location;
- Advocating for vision loss to become widely recognized as a preventable health condition; and
- Conducting more research on the outcomes and efficacy of preventive eye health.

“This report provides substantial evidence that the burdens of age-related vision loss are devastating, for individuals, families, health systems and societies,” said Michael W. Hodin, PhD, Executive Director of the Global Coalition on Aging. “Fortunately, the data also shows that preventive eye health not only saves vision, but investments in improved access to prevention, detection and treatment will ensure that ageing populations remain mobile, engaged, independent.”

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About the [International Federation on Ageing](#)

IFA is an international non-governmental organization with a membership base of NGOs, the corporate sector, academia, government, and individuals. IFA aims to generate positive change for older people throughout the world by stimulating, collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information on rights, policies, and practices that improve the quality of life of people as they age.

“[The High Cost of Low Vision: The Evidence on Ageing and the Loss of Sight](#)” was made possible through an unrestricted educational grant by Bayer Healthcare to the International Federation on Ageing.