

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# GLOBAL AGEING AND VISION ADVOCACY SUMMIT

APRIL 17-18, 2013 | BARCELONA



The Global Ageing and Vision Advocacy Summit brought together academic and advocacy leaders from the sectors of vision and ageing from 12 countries, with the goal of rethinking, reshaping and re-imagining the 21st century as a time when growing older with vision loss is not accepted as inevitable or the norm.

In the first-ever gathering of its kind, the delegates aligned agendas to better understand the comorbid relationship between ageing and vision health. Gaining new knowledge and understanding, they reframed the agenda on ageing and vision health around not only public health and ethical obligations, but also through the lens of economic and fiscal urgency, and created a pathway for targeted global advocacy and awareness efforts.

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## THE CHALLENGES AND COSTS OF VISION LOSS AND AGEING

With approximately 285 million people visually impaired and over 39 million people legally blind, vision loss is a major and unappreciated cause of disability globally. Incredibly, 80 percent of all cases of vision loss are preventable.

The causes of vision loss are many including serious diseases such as macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy, along with conditions such as refractive error and cataract.

Many eye diseases and conditions, and the challenges that accompany them, are most pronounced among older adults, and beyond direct health costs, they present barriers to productivity and block the opportunity to maximize the economic growth potential of the global ageing population.

One of the most common and devastating diseases resulting in vision loss among older adults is age-related macular degeneration (AMD). Globally, AMD affects 30 million people and is the leading cause of vision loss and blindness in high-income nations. Meanwhile, in the less developed world, where 90 percent of all preventable vision loss occurs, twice as many people suffer from vision loss than hearing impairment.

Vision impairment can lead to the isolation and marginalization of older adults, prematurely forcing them into roles of

dependency and disability. Not only are those with vision loss having their quality of life impacted, but there is also a corresponding effect on family caregivers – including loss of productivity in the workplace due to absenteeism and presenteeism. These burdens of care negatively impact family units, lifestyles, and standards of living.

Ultimately, the economic impact is substantial with the indirect costs related to vision loss totaling approximately US\$650 billion annually and the total direct costs estimated to top \$2.8 trillion in 2020.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

In 2020, when there will be 1 billion people over 60 years of age on the planet, will we still consider the “ageing population” to be on the path to vision loss, or will this assumption – due to effective policy, innovation and action – be obsolete?

To help address the future challenges of an ageing population, a strategy for action and investment is necessary to avoid the potentially crippling





health, social and fiscal crises of vision loss.

To date, relative to the size of the problem and its consequences globally, there has been insufficient scientific, social and health services research to quantify the cost-effectiveness of treating the diseases that cause vision loss. However, the limited data that does exist forms the basis for effective advocacy and evidence-informed policy and shows that a strategy for action and investment will be far more effective than inaction.

For example, the World Health Organization has identified cataract operations and providing spectacles for those who need them as two of the most highly cost-effective of all health interventions – potentially solving vision problems for 75 percent of those who are blind or visually impaired.

Further, a PricewaterhouseCoopers/Fred Hollows Foundation study found that there is a two-to-one benefit/cost ratio in vision loss prevention globally, and that benefit rises to four-to-one in the less developed world.

“Saving eyesight is the kind of work that makes a difference in our world, especially for ageing populations.”

**WHO DIRECTOR-GENERAL  
MARGARET CHAN**

## SUMMIT OUTCOMES: PLATFORMS FOR ACTION

With these opportunities identified, three main platforms evolved during the Summit to serve as the basis for ongoing dialogue and action among participating organizations, with potential priorities to be pursued on a global level as well as leveraged nationally.

### 1. Research

There is minimal meaningful data linking vision and ageing, therefore a deeper analysis of the research gaps must be undertaken to more effectively explain the social and economic consequences of a growing ageing population with vision impairment and vision loss. The most effective research will be that which is coordinated among multisectoral and multidisciplinary stakeholders and range from clinical and sociological studies to economic and market research.

### 2. Key Messages

Aligned and consistent messages must be shared between the two fields of vision health and ageing to strengthen coordinated advocacy efforts. Recognizing the differences within countries and across regions, it is essential to develop a set of key messages aimed at increasing awareness of the importance of vision health across the life course



“I would like to learn...how we can advocate for better vision health and more generally to advocate for the creation of a world where older people can enjoy the maximum levels of independence which can be achieved.”

—PROF IAN PHILP



and providing power to those persons and societies at risk.

### 3. Global Advocacy

There has been measurable progress advancing vision impairment on the current global health agenda by numerous advocacy campaigns and organizations in various countries throughout the world, but much work still remains to be done.

Increases in evidence-based research, combined with powerfully aligned key messages across the ageing and vision landscape, will provide a solid foundation and catalyst for global advocacy.

The commitment and collaboration of the ageing and vision sectors to drive change is critical to help ensure that all global citizens have the opportunity to see a future. ■

The illustrations in this report were created by Sara Heppner-Waldston and reflect the dialogue of the delegates during the Global Ageing and Vision Advocacy Summit.

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