



Vision Health and Healthy Ageing | IFA Vision Health Month Statement

May 2021 – Worldwide, at least 2.2 billion people have a vision impairment or blindness, of whom at least 1 billion have a preventable or an unaddressed vision impairment. Almost three in every four people (74%) with vision impairment and blindness are over 50 years of age.

Rapid global population ageing is therefore strongly associated with the increased risk and higher rates of vision impairment. Vision impairment contributes to a higher likelihood of falls and injuries, mobility challenges, premature admission to residential long-term care facilities, and social isolation.

Since its inception, the International Federation on Ageing (IFA) has worked diligently to protect and respect the rights of older people. Its vast portfolios that span adult vaccination, age-friendly cities and communities, and vision health, are viewed through the perspective of the four action areas of the [UN Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030](#) and therein contribute to the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDG).

IFA's vision health portfolio (including the [Eye See You campaign](#) and the [DR Barometer Program](#)) is viewed through the lens of the World Health Organization (WHO) [World Report on Vision](#) with the ultimate goal of influencing policy and advancing the vision health agenda. Both bodies of work focus on mobilizing scientific evidence to influence policy and practice around ageing- and diabetes-related vision complications.

To address gaps in patient care and education, treatment guidelines and protocols, and coordinated care, that impact outcomes for older adults and adults with diabetes, the IFA is dedicated to being a primary source of connection for health care professionals, professional and patient advocacy associations committed to producing sustainable and tangible actions in the field of vision health through a common agenda.



Our priorities:

Prevention

Civil society plays a crucial role in educating and empowering at-risk populations about ageing- and diabetes-related vision complications, as well as changing and improving global policy towards new models of care that emphasize screening at the primary care level. Strategic advocacy is key to creating resilient, engaged communities that have a voice in informing, developing and steering policy. Civil society with its expansive bandwidth is the bridge between communities and policymakers to prioritize prevention within vision health policy and practice.

Access

For millions of older people, some living on low incomes, in rural and urban communities, the hospital, either near or far, might be the only source of health care. Factoring in wait times, the distribution of eye care workforce and the cost of care, access becomes a real and urgent issue to be addressed. Representing public and community interests in policy, building consensus, and gathering public support for policies are but a few of the meaningful approaches towards improving access to affordable, timely, and quality vision care.

Equity

Four out of every five individuals with vision loss live in low-and middle-income countries (LMIC), and in most countries good vision and eye health are not experienced equally. Inequities in vision health outcomes exist because of the variance in access to eye care due to social determinants and discrimination (on the basis of gender, ethnicity, age, and social status) or unequal quality of care received. Disaggregated data collected consistently and regularly is critical to inform equitable vision health policies and interventions. The right to sight is non-negotiable and addressing vision health inequity at a population level entails the use of evidence-based interventions that explore barriers and identify best practices.

Our commitment:

Integrating vision health into health systems

To make SDG 3.8 a reality (Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all), eye care must be integral to universal health coverage (UHC). The DR Barometer Program is determined to drive policy towards integrated people-centred eye care (IPEC). To that end, the IFA calls on policymakers to deliver patient-centred care and ensure that primary care physicians and other health care providers have the skills required to detect eye conditions in time to preserve vision.



Functional collaboration

The WHO World Report on Vision highlighted the need for collaboration across government, civil society, and industry. Mobilizing and organizing interdisciplinary cooperation ensures the alignment of messages and a unified agenda to promote the importance of integrating eye care into primary care as well as improving policy toward equitable and accessible eye care.

Effective communication strategies

Underserved groups and at-risk populations need a trusted voice that represents their interests, disseminates evidence-based information, and is well-connected globally with policy makers and stakeholders.

Through strategic partnerships, civil society has an enduring and continual comparative advantage towards accessing resources or addressing unmet needs such as universal health coverage. The Eye See You campaign represents patient and ageing advocacy organizations, vision health experts, industry and academics dedicated to ensuring that older adults are able to make informed choices regarding the most appropriate, safe, and effective vision treatments for their needs alongside their caregivers and vision care provider.

Media Contact

For more information or interview opportunities, please contact Ms Ashney Patrick, Media, Marketing and Communications Officer, IFA at APatrick@ifa.ngo.

About the International Federation on Ageing (IFA)

IFA is an international, non-governmental organization (NGO) with a unique membership base comprising government, NGOs, academics, industry, and individuals in over 80 countries. Now over 45 years old, the IFA has become known as a leading and innovative organization that works across disciplines and sectors toward common goals that improve the lives of older people. Through IFA's formal relations with the World Health Organization (WHO) and general consultative status at the United Nations and its agencies, the IFA is in the position to advocate directly with member states and contribute to and inform intergovernmental dialogue.