

## **Vision loss is impacting millions of older people worldwide and is to a large extent avoidable. It's time to bring the eye health and ageing sectors together to address this unmet need.**

October 2023 - Today, an estimated 73 percent of people living with avoidable vision impairment are older people – amounting to 800 million people globally.

As the world's population ages, this figure will rise to 927 million by 2050 unless urgent action is taken.

A new report released on World Sight Day by The Fred Hollows Foundation and the International Federation of Ageing (IFA), calls for close collaboration between the eye health and ageing sectors to protect and restore vision in older age.

The report *Connecting Healthy Ageing and Vision* presents vision as instrumental to advancing healthy ageing by pinpointing the wide-ranging impacts of vision loss on individuals and society at large.

The policy brief provides an overview of the eye health of older people today, and proposes key actions needed within and beyond the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) to ensure that older people's eye health and quality of life are preserved.

Dr Vânia de la Fuente-Núñez, Healthy Ageing Senior Advisor at The Fred Hollows Foundation said vision loss affects the physical and mental health of older people and their ability to function in the community.

“Losing sight means facing an increased risk of mortality, cognitive decline, and depression, and, where environments are not accessible, often means losing your independence, confining many older people to their home, and increasing social isolation and loneliness in later life.

“Older women are also disproportionately affected, accounting for 56 percent of vision loss cases,” Dr de la Fuente-Núñez said.

International Federation on Ageing Director of Policy and Advocacy Katrina Bouzanis said the consequences of vision impairment among older people reached far beyond the individual.

“Caregivers often struggle to balance their needs with those of an older family member with vision loss, losing opportunities to earn a living, which can result in productivity losses and cause financial hardship to families,” Ms Bouzanis said.

While many eye conditions become more common as people age, Dr de la Fuente-Núñez said blindness was not an inevitable part of ageing.

“Every person should have the opportunity to live a long and healthy life. Making this a reality requires recognizing vision as a key part of overall health in the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing and prioritising healthy ageing from research through to policy and practice.”

“By acting now, we can put an end to avoidable vision loss in later life and ensure that more older people are able to live independent lives and continue to contribute to local communities,” Dr de la Fuente-Núñez said.

The Fred Hollows Foundation is contributing to the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) through this work as well as a series of innovative pilot projects in Vietnam, China, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda that are improving access to eye care services and integrated care for older people.

Through its past work, the Foundation has already restored sight to more than 3 million people worldwide, including many older people.

With the mission to drive the agenda of the world’s ageing population, IFA’s work is aligned and informed by the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing and key actions to improve the lives of older people. To this end, for almost a decade, IFA has been working to promote the importance of vision as a key component of healthy ageing and improve person-centredness within care, multisectoral collaboration and evidence-informed policy and practice.

The *Connecting Healthy Ageing and Vision* report can be accessed at <https://shorturl.at/lnxBI>

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**About The International Federation on Ageing** is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) with a unique membership base comprising government, NGOs, academia, industry, and individuals in over 80 countries. Over the last 50 years, 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. The IFA has general consultative status at the United Nations and, as a non-State actor at the World Health Organization (WHO), is in a position to contribute to and inform intergovernmental dialogue while supporting civil society at a national and local level.