

76 World Health Assembly

21-30 May 2023

International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness

Agenda item:

Pillar 1: One billion more people benefitting from universal health coverage

13.2 Political declaration of the third high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases, and mental health

Draft updated menu of policy options and cost-effective interventions for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases

International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, an overarching alliance for global eye health advocacy is presenting the statement on behalf of:

- International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness
- The Fred Hollows Foundation
- L'Organisation pour la Prévention de la Cécité (OPC)
- Sightsaver/The Royal Commonwealth Society for Blind
- World Blind Union
- Christoffel Blinden Mission Christian Blindness Mission
- International Diabetes Federation

We welcome the WHO's Updated menu of policy options and cost-effective interventions for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases, we particularly welcome the inclusion of Diabetic Retinopathy screening for all diabetes patients and laser photocoagulation for prevention of blindness. Currently, 3.8 million people are living with blindness or visually impairment due to DR with 1 million people irreversibly blind. Diabetic Retinopathy, an avoidable condition is the fifth leading cause of blindness in 2020 and as the global prevalence of diabetes increases, the prevalence of vision loss from DR will also increase.

We also welcome the early diagnosis and comprehensive treatment of the six index childhood cancers which includes retinoblastoma, a childhood cancer of eye. 2.2 billion people, including 450 million children, are living with vision impairment. Among them, 1.1 billion have preventable vision impairment but do not have access to the basic eye care services they need. Without action, these numbers are set to grow further. It is estimated that by 2050 half the global population could be living with myopia – short-sightedness- a challenge on a scale hard to imagine.

Noncommunicable eye conditions, such as DR, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration, complications of high myopia and rare diseases in eyes can cause vision impairment and blindness if not treated timely. Such conditions impact increasing numbers while posing significant challenge to health systems.

NCDs and mental health have reciprocal link with eye health conditions. People with vision loss are particularly vulnerable to experiencing health conditions such as depression, affecting around 1 in 3 adults with vision loss; an increased risk of dementia; and a higher rate of depression and anxiety.

We encourage member states to adopt and implement the draft updated menu of policy options and cost-effective interventions for the prevention and control of NCDs with specific commitments to integrating eye health services within the care system.

(330 words)