

April 6, 2017

Richard Besser, MD, President & CEO
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Judith Monroe, MD, FAAFP, President & CEO
CDC Foundation

Anne Schuchat, MD, RADM, USPHS, Acting Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Dear Drs. Besser, Schuchat, and Monroe,

On behalf of a broad spectrum of organizations whose collective interests are ensuring optimal vision, the eye health of our nation and our communities, and functional independence for those with vision loss, we thank the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the CDC Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) for your important work on the **500 Cities Project** and the recent launch of your website [500 Cities: Local Data for Better Health](#). This will be a much needed asset for those working to improve the health of their local communities. *We are concerned, however, that vision and eye health was not included alongside the 27 chronic disease measures tracked.*

Eye health is highly valued across the lifespan – vision plays an important role in children’s success in school, adults’ employability, and older adults’ sustained independence. And while many living with vision loss experience a quality of life equal to that of their sighted peers, according to one recent survey, Americans across all racial and ethnic lines describe losing vision as *potentially* having the greatest negative impact on their life ([“Public Attitudes About Eye and Vision Health”](#)).

According to RWJF’s own [Chronic Care: Making the Case for Ongoing Care](#), eye disorders are the fifth leading chronic condition among those aged 65 years and over and seventh across all age groups. This same study finds that eye disorders are the third most prevalent chronic condition among children, behind only asthma and other upper respiratory disease.

We note that the 500 Cities initiative relies on data from the CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, the Census 2010 population, and the American Community Survey estimates. While it is far from complete, there are avenues in each of these to gather vision-related information. And where there are gaps, we encourage efforts to fill them.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) recently released a report that recognizes that for too long vision and eye health have not received the attention and investment they warrant, given their importance to public health ([“Making Eye Health a Population Health Imperative: Vision for Tomorrow”](#)).

As we age, we are more likely to experience other chronic conditions such as diabetes, hearing impairment, heart problems, hypertension, joint symptoms, low back pain, and stroke at the same time as vision loss. In the absence of high-quality rehabilitation and supports, these multiple conditions can lead to falls, injury, depression, social isolation, diminished health-related quality of life, and premature death. However, many health initiatives at the community, city, and state levels do not fully take into

account either the broad range of vision disorders and their comorbidities or their consequences for health and quality of life.

The above-mentioned NASEM report states that “vision impairment and blindness are appropriate targets for surveillance because they adversely affect a large portion of the population, affect populations unequally, can be improved by treatment and preventive efforts, and will become an increasing burden as the population ages.”

As you well know, surveillance is at the heart of public health. The CDC’s Vision Health Initiative is currently supporting a project – *The Vision and Eye Health Surveillance System*. We applaud this effort as an important step. However, given the prevalence of vision problems and the many comorbidities thereof, we believe including vision problems alongside the 27 chronic disease measures currently in the 500 Cities Project will draw attention to the scope of this challenge and, more importantly, help lead to stronger interventions in our communities and states and have a major impact on the nation’s health.

As community partners in vision and eye health, we collectively acknowledge the good work of the 500 Cities Project and recommend that surveillance of vision concerns be added to this important initiative.

Sincerely,

ACB of Wisconsin

Alabama Lions Sight Conservation Association

Alabama Vision Coalition

American Academy of Ophthalmology

American Academy of Optometry

American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus

American Association of Diabetes Educators

American Association on Health and Disability

American Council of the Blind

American Council of the Blind of Nebraska

American Council of the Blind of New Mexico

American Foundation for the Blind

American Optometric Association

American Society of Ophthalmic Registered Nurses

Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER)

Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology

Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired

Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry

Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology

Beaver County (PA) Association for the Blind

Bay State Council of the Blind

Blair/Clearfield Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired

Blind Association of Butler and Armstrong

Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh

Blind LGBT Pride International
Blindskills
Bosma Enterprises
BrightFocus Foundation
Bucks County (PA) Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Byers Eye Institute at Stanford University
Cahaba Valley Health Care
Cambria County (PA) Association for the Blind & Handicapped
Case Western Reserve University School of Nursing
Casey Eye Institute, Oregon Health and Science University
Center for the Visually Impaired, Atlanta
Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Pennsylvania
Center for Vision Loss
Central Susquehanna Sight Services
Central Ohio Lions Eye Bank
Cincinnati Association f/t Blind & Visually Impaired
Cincinnati Eye Institute
Cincinnati Eye Institute Foundation
ClearVision Optometry - VisionSource network
Columbia River Services for the Blind
Combat Blindness International, Inc.
Community Services for Sight
Department of Ophthalmology, Georgetown University School of Medicine
Department of Ophthalmology, NYU Langone Medical Center
Department of Ophthalmology, Rutgers-New Jersey Medical School
Department of Ophthalmology, University of Alabama Birmingham
Department of Ophthalmology, University of California San Francisco
Department of Ophthalmology, University of Florida
Department of Ophthalmology, University of Kansas Medical Center
Department of Ophthalmology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Department of Ophthalmology, University of Pittsburgh
Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences, Case Western Reserve University
Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences, Medical College of Wisconsin
Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences, University of Louisville, Kentucky
Duke University Eye Center
Emory Eye Center
Eye Bank Association of America
Eyesight Foundation of Alabama
Family Vision Center
Fayette County (PA) Association for the Blind
Florida Association of Agencies Serving the Blind, Inc.

Florida Council of the Blind
Florida Lions Conklin Center for the Blind
ForSight Vision
Georgia 2020
Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation
Greater Wilkes-Barre Association for the Blind
Guide Dog Users, Inc.
Guide Dogs of Hawaii
Guiding Eyes for the Blind
Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Healthy Eyes Alliance
Helen Keller International
Honolulu District School Visual Impairment Program
Houston Health Department
Houston Health Foundation
Illinois College of Optometry
Illinois Society for the Prevention of Blindness
Independence for the Blind
International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness
International Eye Foundation
International Retinal Research Foundation
John Moran Eye Center
Kansas Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons
Keystone Blind Association
Lackawanna Association for the Blind
Lavelle Fund for the Blind
Lighthouse Guild
Lighthouse Louisiana
Macula Vision Research Foundation
Macular Degeneration Partnership
Macular Degeneration Support
Missouri Council of the Blind
Montgomery County (PA) Association for the Blind
National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research
National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health at Prevent Blindness
National Keratoconus Foundation
Nationwide Children's Hospital
Nevada Council of the Blind
New England College of Optometry
New England Eye Center, Tufts Medical Center
NOAH - National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation

North Central Sight Services
Northgate Eye Center
NuVisions Center
NYISE
Ohio Public Health Association
Opticians Association of Ohio
Pennsylvania Association for the Blind
Pennsylvania College of Optometry/Salus University
Pennsylvania Council of the Blind
Perkins School for the Blind
Prevent Blindness
Prevent Blindness Georgia
Prevent Blindness Iowa
Prevent Blindness North Carolina
Prevent Blindness Northeast Region
Prevent Blindness Northern California
Prevent Blindness Texas
Prevent Blindness Wisconsin
Prevent Blindness, Ohio Affiliate
Reader's Digest Partners for Sight Foundation
Red Rose Council of the Blind
Research to Prevent Blindness
River Region Vision Source
San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind
Script Your Future Alabama
SEE International
Seva Foundation
Shiley Eye Institute, University of California San Diego
Sight Center of Northwest Pennsylvania
Sight Savers America
SKB
South Central Blind Association
State University of New York College of Optometry
Tennessee Council of the Blind
That Man May See
The Vision Council
UAB Vision Science Research Center
University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Optometry
University of Houston College of Optometry
University of Pikeville, Kentucky College of Optometry
UPMC (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center)

Utah Councils of the Blind
UTMB Galveston
Venago County (PA) Association for the Blind
Virginia Tech Advanced Research Institute
VisionCorps
Vision 2020 USA
Vision Forward Association
Vision Resource Center of Berks County (PA)
Vision Resources of Central Pennsylvania
Vision Source
VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired
VisionServe Alliance
Visually Impaired Persons Support (VIPS)
Washington-Greene County (PA) Blind Association
Westmoreland County (PA) Blind Association
West Virginia University Eye Institute
Wills Eye Hospital
Wyoming Council of the Blind