



International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness

## **COUNCIL OF MEMBERS MEETING**

September 16th , 2012

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AGENDA ITEM 4.5: NORTH AMERICA REGIONAL REPORT

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## **IAPB Regional Report –NORTH AMERICA REGION**

Due to a transition in leadership for the region, this report is a shortened version. As you know the North America region of IAPB is composed of three national entities, Canada, the Caribbean and the United States. What follows is a concise description of major actions of the past year.

### **CANADA**

Vision 2020/Canada has been formed and is chaired by John Rafferty of CNIB. The main focus of activity up until now has been World Sight Day activities across the country, particularly in Ottawa targeting the national parliament. The focus for V202/Canada for the near future will be to engage Health Canada in blindness prevention issues and then build to supplement support for international blindness prevention activities.

### **CARIBBEAN**

1. Launched in July 2000 in Tobago, Vision 2020 (Right To Sight) Caribbean has been operating on a series of 5-year strategic framework since 2003.
2. Our major initiatives include:
  - 2.1 HRD emphasizing the training of: Ophthalmologists, Optometrists and Refractionists to serve countries of the Caribbean. 12 Ophthalmology residents are currently in training in programmes across Haiti and Latin America. The first cohort of 22 Optometry students are entering their 3<sup>rd</sup> year in September 2012, and we are preparing to admit the 2<sup>nd</sup> cohort of approximately 20 in August of 2012.
  - 2.2 Development of infrastructure and technology. To that end we have embarked on the upgrading of 13 vision centers (eye clinics) 5 Spectacle Laboratory and 7 Operating theaters, across the region.
  - 2.3 Advocacy, targeting senior MOH officials - This takes the form of our annual Caribbean Vision 2020 meeting which brings MOH officials and civil society partners together from up to 15 countries across the Caribbean- Leading to the development and implementation of national Strategic frameworks.

The past year has been a busy one for the VISION 2020/USA organizations. Here are some of the highlights. In October 2011, on World Sight Day, the third Congressional briefing was held on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. The theme was “Cost Effectiveness of Eye Care Interventions”. It was well attended and was the third of three briefing held in a month period, dealing with eye disease. In this way we can get our message reinforced among the decision makers in Washington. There will be another Congressional briefing on WSD this year.

In March, an introductory meeting was held at USAID with representatives of VISION 2020/Australia. In the early stages, we hope this will lead to a larger discussion among national development organizations regarding eye care issues. The dialogue will continue in the fall.

In June the first National Eye Summit was held in Washington. This was sponsored by Prevent Blindness America. It was a large gathering of the blindness prevention community to mark the publication of the latest version of Vision Problems in the USA, which is now available as an interactive module, which documents the extent of vision loss in the country. The results show that there are 1.2 million people over 40 years of age who are blind. Leading causes of blindness remain macular degeneration and glaucoma, but diabetic retinopathy is rapidly emerging as a major cause of vision loss.

The VISION 2020/USA meeting was held at that time. Accomplishments for the year were reviewed. Mark Ackermann, CEO of Lighthouse International, was selected as the incoming Chair with Sandy Bloch remaining as Vice Chair. A meeting was also held in Washington, bringing together several of the various Federal agencies dealing with vision. It is hoped that this dialogue can continue in order to improve the status of blindness prevention at the national level.

Other developments during the year included a dramatic increase in the funding for neglected tropical diseases, including trachoma and onchocerciasis, on the part of USAID. Many VISION 2020/USA member organizations are involved in these activities and USAID is to be commended for their support.

Finally, after eight years of dedicated service, Pat Ferguson of OEU has stepped down as Regional Chair. Pat did a great job and we will miss her and wish her well.

**Louis Pizzarello, MD MPH,  
Incoming Regional Chair**