



NAEVR
National Alliance For
Eye And Vision Research

Serving as Friends of the National Eye Institute

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Good afternoon, I am James Jorkasky, Executive Director of the National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (NAEVR), which serves as the privately funded “Friends of the National Eye Institute (NEI)”. NAEVR represents 55 organizations that support vision research to prevent blindness and to save and restore sight, including professional societies in ophthalmology and optometry, consumer and patient groups, and industry.

May is Healthy Vision Month. Vision health is critical for healthy people. In more than 40 years of public opinion surveys, respondents have consistently identified fear of blindness as second only to fear of cancer. In a recent NEI study, 71 percent of respondents stated that vision loss would have the greatest impact on their lives. Vision loss is associated with increased healthcare costs, lost productivity, reduced independence, diminished quality of life, increased depression, and accelerated mortality.

2020 is a pivotal year in terms of unprecedented demographic trends, especially the aging of the population and the disproportionate incidence of eye disease in growing minority populations. NEI has estimated that the current number of 38 million Americans over age 40 who experience blindness, low vision, or an age-related eye disease—such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD), glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, or cataract—will grow to more than 50 million by year 2020. The current cost of vision impairment and eye disease, estimated by the NEI at \$68 billion annually, will grow exponentially.

In 2010, the first wave of 78 million Baby Boomers celebrate their 65th birthday, an age of increased risk from chronic eye disease. Each day, for 18 years afterwards, about 10,000 Americans will turn 65, leading to a huge impact on the Medicare budget as additional funds are needed to treat age-related diseases, including those of the eye. The year 2020 is smack dab in the middle of that tidal wave!

I am focusing on the aging eye aspect of healthy people for two reasons: first, the unprecedented challenge of chronic eye disease; and second, the need for healthy vision in seniors, who will increasingly work beyond age 65. In fact, the U.S. Census data for 2006 reported that, nationally, one-in-four individuals age 65-74 was still working, as compared to one-in-five in 2000. That percentage was even higher in the National Capital region, where about one-third of people in that age range continued to work.

In closing, vision health, generally, and senior vision health, specifically, should be a goal of Healthy People 2020 programs for research, prevention, and education. Or, in other words, HP2020’s vision must include vision! Thank you.