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**Statement from Paul A. Sieving, M.D., Ph.D., Director of the National Eye Institute, National Institutes of Health, during Healthy Vision Month, May 2010**

During the eighth annual Healthy Vision Month observance this May, the National Eye Institute (NEI), part of the National Institutes of Health, encourages community organizations and the American people to make vision health a priority. This year's theme, "Your Eyes are the Windows to Your Health," highlights the importance of scheduling an eye exam to maintain good quality eye health and preserve the sense of sight.

In a 2005 national survey conducted by NEI and the Lions Clubs International Foundation, 70 percent of adults reported that the loss of eyesight would have a great impact on their daily lives—a 10 on a scale of 1 to 10. However, 26 percent reported they had not had an eye exam within the previous two years, and 9 percent reported never having had their eyes examined.

Unfortunately, an estimated 14 million Americans are visually impaired. In fact, the prevalence of myopia, or nearsightedness, was shown to have increased 66 percent in the past 30 years, according to a 2009 NEI study. About 11 million Americans have refractive errors—common vision problems such as nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism, and presbyopia—that can be detected during an eye examination and simply remedied with glasses or contact lenses.

Americans can also become visually impaired or blind from eye diseases. Of adults age 40 or older in the United States, more than 2 million have glaucoma, more than 4 million have diabetic retinopathy, and more than 1.75 million have age-related macular degeneration. These numbers will continue to increase as the population ages. These and other eye diseases have few warning signs or symptoms but can be detected in their early stages through a comprehensive dilated eye examination. Early diagnosis is critical, as vision loss and blindness may be prevented through timely treatment.

During a comprehensive dilated eye exam, the pupils are dilated with eye drops so an eye care professional can examine the back of the eye to detect signs of eye conditions such as diabetic

retinopathy, glaucoma, or retinal detachment. Refractive errors can also be detected during a comprehensive eye exam.

NEI is committed to educating the public about vision and eye health. NEI's National Eye Health Education Program has developed a wide variety of resources and materials that can be used during Healthy Vision Month and throughout the year. Visit the NEI Healthy Eyes Toolkit at [www.nei.nih.gov/healthyeyestoolkit](http://www.nei.nih.gov/healthyeyestoolkit) to find free resources that can be used to educate the public about the importance of eye exams. The toolkit includes e-cards, text messages, fact sheets, drop-in news articles, web links, posters, stickers, bookmarks, public service announcements, and more.

For more information about Healthy Vision Month, visit <http://healthyvision2010.nei.nih.gov/hvm>.

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The National Eye Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health, leads the federal government's research on the visual system and eye diseases. NEI supports basic and clinical science programs that result in the development of sight-saving treatments. For more information, visit [www.nei.nih.gov](http://www.nei.nih.gov).

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) — The Nation's Medical Research Agency — includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov).

