



VISION HEALTH MONTH

Remarks of the Honourable Diane F. Griffin, Senator for Prince Edward Island

May 17, 2017

Honourable Senators:

May is National Vision Health Month. It is important to address the pending vision crisis in Canada. After age 40, the number of cases of vision loss doubles every decade, and triples at age 75. Vision loss is devastating to independent aging: doubling the difficulties of daily living and social dependence, tripling the risk of depression, and quadrupling the risk of hip fractures.

Vision disorders are a pediatric health problem as nearly 25% of school-age children have vision problems. In the next decade, the number of Canadians with vision loss is set to increase by almost 30 percent. The economic cost could rise to as much as \$30 billion annually by the year 2032.

Seventeen years ago, Canada signed on to the World Health Organization's global vision health plan to reduce vision loss. However, Canada has not taken demonstrable action to achieve this goal, whereas the UK and Australia have adopted comprehensive plans to honour their WHO commitments.

Australia's plan is a government-led initiative to eliminate avoidable vision loss, raise public awareness, integrate services and improve access in remote and Indigenous communities.

The UK Vision Strategy is to improve eye health services and increase inclusion in society for blind and partially sighted people.

What can we do here to properly address vision health?

a) Canada can invest in a National Framework for Action for the promotion of eye health and prevention of avoidable blindness.

Patient-centered eye care should be integral to primary healthcare, and could be achieved through partnerships between governments and stakeholders.

The National Framework could include funding for public awareness and research. As well, establishing a vision desk at the Public Health Agency of Canada would facilitate better integration of eye care into the health system.

b) A non-partisan Vision Caucus could be established to facilitate dialogue to promote vision health.

The USA, Australia and the UK have vision caucuses who meet with eye health providers and other stakeholders. The Vision Caucus could work to promote and set out strategies for the proposed National Framework.

Let's create a future where everyone has the opportunity to fully participate in life. This month, let's work with eye health professionals to bring better vision care to Canadians.
