



Although 70% of people from around the world would rather give up 10 years of their life, or even sacrifice a limb, than lose their eyesight less than one third of those polled take the basic steps necessary to preserve eyesight. (*"Barometer of Global Eye Health," a 2012 global survey*)

There is a vision crisis emerging in Canada. The number of seniors is growing at an unprecedented rate. Statistics Canada estimates that seniors could outnumber children by as early as 2015. A national vision strategy is required to address the age related eye disease that will accompany this shift.

75% of visual impairment is preventable if detected and treated early enough. (CNIB)

Support

Aging brings with it some natural changes in our vision. Vision loss however, is largely unnecessary. Adults aged 65 or older, are at higher risk for a number of eye conditions and diseases that can threaten sight, including:

Cataracts: distorted or cloudy vision caused by the lens inside the eye losing its transparency over time.

Diabetic Retinopathy: a weakening of the tiny blood vessels in the retina of the eye resulting in blood leakage, retinal swelling and new blood vessel growth. If left untreated, blindness can result.

Macular degeneration: a disease that results in degenerative changes to your central vision, and is a

leading cause of vision loss among older adults

Glaucoma: a "silent thief of sight" that often has no symptoms until significant damage has occurred. Glaucoma is usually caused by elevated pressure within the eye, and can lead to serious vision loss if not detected and treated at an early stage.

Low vision: very limited sight that, without treatment, interferes with a person's daily activities and quality of life.

In their early stages, many eye diseases associated with aging may not have symptoms, and therefore, can go undiagnosed. In addition to eye ailments, several common health conditions, such as high blood pressure, arthritis and diabetes can be detected through a comprehensive eye examination.

Regular optometric care can often detect early indicators of disease not yet visible in other parts of the body.

The Cost of Vision Loss

Vision impairment prevents healthy and independent aging.

- It doubles the difficulties of daily living
- Nursing home admissions occur three years earlier
- Doubles social dependence
- Doubles the risk of falls
- Triples the risk of depression
- Quadruples the risk of hip fractures
- Doubles the mortality rate



The financial cost of vision loss in Canada was estimated to be \$19.1 billion in 2012. Indirect costs are \$8.1 billion.¹

Recommendations

Given the prevalence of preventable age-related vision loss, Canada needs a nationally coordinated plan of action for vision health. Without intervention we will see a diminished quality of life for seniors and increased burden on the health care system. By 2031, approximately 25% of the population will be over the age of 65. We recommend:

- A national public education campaign for seniors and health professionals
- Establish a National Framework for Action to Promote Vision Health and Prevent Avoidable Blindness

1. CNIB, Cost of Vision Loss, 2012