

Issue At A Glance:

Vision and Eye Health in Children and Adults

Vision health significantly impacts both adults and children, affecting development in children and overall quality of life among older adults. This brief provides an overview of the importance of early vision screening in children, the Vision Healthcare Initiative, and policies proposed to address eye health among children and adults.

Introduction

Vision is a crucial sense that affects nearly every aspect of life. While it is often taken for granted, losing vision can make activities like learning, walking, reading, and working much more difficult. Vision impairment occurs when an eye condition affects the visual system, and everyone will eventually experience at least one eye condition that requires proper care.¹

Vision health is vital for both children and adults, influencing development, learning, independence, and overall quality of life. Early detection and treatment are particularly important for children, while vision loss in adults can lead to social isolation, reduced employment opportunities, and an increased risk of depression.^{1,2,3}

Timely access to quality eye care can help prevent many of the negative outcomes of vision issues. This brief provides an overview of the importance of early vision screening in children, the Vision Healthcare Initiative, and policies proposed to address eye health among children and adults.

Common Eye Conditions

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| Myopia | Or nearsightedness is a condition where nearby object appear clear, but distant ones are blurry. ⁴ |
| Hyperopia | Or farsightedness is a condition where distant objects appear clear, but close-up objects are blurry. ⁵ |
| Amblyopia | Or lazy eye is a condition that causes blurry vision due to the difference in how the two eyes focus. ⁶ |
| Strabismus | Or eye misalignment is a condition where one eye points in a different direction than the other. ⁷ |
| Cataract | A condition where the lens of the eye becomes cloudy, leading to blurred or impaired vision. ⁸ |

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Importance of Early Vision Screening in Children

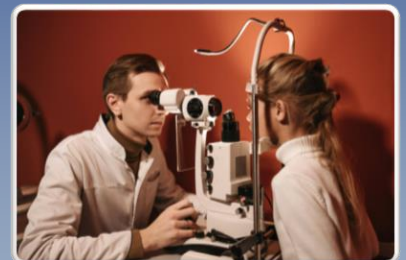
August is recognized as Children's Eye Health and Safety Month, highlighting the importance of vision and eye health in a child's development, learning, and social interactions.⁹ Visual function is crucial for physical, intellectual, social, and emotional growth. Regular vision screenings for children are essential for identifying eye problems early, allowing for timely treatment and helping prevent vision loss or developmental delays that could affect learning and overall wellbeing.¹⁰

In younger children, screenings primarily focus on identifying those at risk for amblyopia, a condition that can lead to permanent vision loss if left untreated. As children grow older, the goal of vision screenings expands to include detecting uncorrected refractive errors, such as myopia or hyperopia, that may affect their ability to see clearly and perform well in school.¹⁰ When vision disorders go undetected and untreated, they can interfere with learning, causing children to struggle academically, fall behind their peers, exhibit behavioral issues in the classroom, and potentially experience lasting vision impairment.¹¹

Evidence-based recommendations can help protect a child's vision and prevent common eye problems. Encouraging outdoor play for at least two hours a day helps reduce the risk of myopia (nearsightedness) and promotes healthy eye growth. Additionally, encouraging proper posture while reading or using screens and keeping a safe distance of 18-24 inches from devices can help reduce eye strain, while practicing good eye hygiene such as not rubbing the eyes and washing hands frequently helps prevent infections. Lastly, regular eye checkups are also crucial in monitoring vision over time, ensuring that any potential issues are caught early.¹² Taking these simple steps to protect a child's vision can ensure they enjoy healthy eyesight and continue to thrive academically, socially and emotionally.

Vision Health Initiative

In 2005, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) launched the Vision Health Initiative (VHI) to lead national efforts in preventing vision impairment and loss due to eye disease.¹³ The initiative focuses on monitoring and addressing the burden of vision impairment and blindness by refining vision surveillance at both state and national levels and helping states to develop their capacity to implement effective surveillance systems. VHI also aims to improve quality of life, increase access to eye care, and reduce health disparities for those at risk of vision loss. Additionally, it fosters strategic partnerships, provides technical assistance, and integrates vision health activities into existing public health programs to enhance and protect vision health.¹⁴



Policies Proposed to Address Eye Health

Medicare Dental, Vision, and Hearing Benefit Act of 2025 (H.R. 2045)

Nearly 68 million seniors and individuals with disabilities face high costs for essential care such as hearing aids, dentures, and eyeglasses. Furthermore, more than 26 million Medicare beneficiaries currently lack dental coverage, and many suffer from significant vision and hearing impairments.¹⁵

Introduced on March 11, 2025, the Medicare Dental, Vision, and Hearing Benefit Act of 2025 (H.R. 2045) aims to amend the Social Security Act to include coverage for dental, vision, and hearing care under Medicare.¹⁶ Specifically, H.R. 2045 aims to broaden Medicare to include full vision care, including eye exams and prescription glasses, beginning January 1, 2027.¹⁵

Early Detection of Vision Impairments for Children Act of 2025 (H.R. 2527)

A child's vision evolves from birth through childhood, requiring regular screening, timely referrals, and necessary treatment to catch issues early and prevent permanent vision loss. Despite national health goals emphasizing early detection of vision problems, the U.S. lacks a federally funded program focused specifically on children's eye health.^{17,18}

Therefore, the Early Detection of Vision Impairments for Children Act of 2025 (H.R. 2527) was introduced on March 31, 2025, and aims to amend the Public Health Service Act to enhance children's vision and eye health by

providing grants to states, territories, and tribal organizations, along with technical assistance to support these initiatives.¹⁹ Specifically, the goal of H.R. 2527 is to ensure that every child with a potential vision issue is identified and connected to appropriate care. It would support schools, health professionals, and families with updated, evidence-based screening methods, strengthen referrals, and improve follow-up to ensure children receive timely treatment and avoid vision loss.¹⁷

Vision Lab Choice Act of 2024 (S. 5375)

Vision benefit managers (VBM)s often make it harder for optometrists and eye care professional to deliver care. Currently, VBM)s dominate nearly every aspect of the vision care industry, including managing insurance plans and controlling frame and lens manufacturing. This concentration of power can limit choices and lead to higher costs for both doctors and patients.²⁰

Therefore, on November 11, 2024, the Vision Lab Choice Act of 2024 (S. 5375) was introduced in the 118th Congress, aiming to allow optometrists greater autonomy when choosing the labs and suppliers they work with. The bill aimed to reduce the influence of VBM)s, which often limit choice and drive-up costs for doctors and patients.²¹ However, as it was part of the 118th Congress, it has no potential to become law unless reintroduced in the 119th Congress, making it an unsuccessful attempt rather than an active legislative effort.

Conclusion

Vision loss can profoundly impact not only the individuals affected, but also their friends, family, and society. It can reduce quality of life, independence, and mobility. Vision impairment and loss are linked to falls, injuries, and decline in mental health, cognition, social interaction and employment.²²

Early detection and treatment of eye conditions are essential for both children and adults to preserve vision, prevent complications, and ensure a better quality of life. Regular eye care, including routine screenings and prompt intervention, can significantly reduce the impact of vision impairment, fostering healthier and more independent lives for all.^{2,3}

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Did you know?

Studies show that one in four adults with vision loss experience anxiety or depression, and young adults with vision impairments are nearly five times more likely to face these mental health challenges compared to older adults.³



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