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New Study Identifies Obstacles for Vulnerable Adults Referred for Follow-up Eye Exams

- Lack of Transportation Cited as Most Common Reason for Missed Follow-up Care Appointments -

CHICAGO (Oct. 2, 2013) – Vision screenings, performed by trained and certified personnel, are effective tools to promote the early detection and treatment of vision impairments. Unfortunately, half of high-risk, uninsured/underinsured individuals identified through vision screening as needing eye exams performed by eye care professionals do not attend – even when the exams are offered free-of-charge.

To investigate the reasons behind this and to help formulate a strategy to address the barriers to care, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provided a grant to Prevent Blindness America, the nation's oldest volunteer eye health and safety organization. The new report, "[Barriers to Attending an Eye Examination after Vision Screening Referral within a Vulnerable Population](#)," includes a two-year evaluation of the effectiveness of a vision screening program at the Physician's Free Clinic (PFC) of Columbus, Ohio. Prevent Blindness Ohio (PBO), a nonprofit affiliate of Prevent Blindness America, trained and equipped first- and second- year medical students to provide vision screening as part of the registration intake process at the PFC. The program also provided vision health educational materials in multiple languages and facilitated the provision of eye exams both on-site and within the immediate vicinity of the PFC.

Patients who attended a vision screening and were referred for an exam but did not attend were contacted and asked whether they were interested in receiving a free, complete eye exam available during the hours of the free clinic and at an offsite center within three blocks of the clinic. Those who missed their appointments were asked why they did not attend and what would make it easier to attend. The primary reason given for missed appointments was the lack of transportation. In fact, 24 percent of respondents stated that they could not afford transportation. Other reasons given included forgetting the appointment and other scheduling conflicts.

The results of the study suggest that multiple elements should be considered when establishing a vision care system for a vulnerable population. The approach that the research showed to have the most success for follow-up would be immediate, on-site evaluation of those who are referred for an eye exam. Other considerations include

telephone and mail reminders of future appointments in the native language of the patient, increased hours of operation and decreased wait time to care.

“A vision screening is a crucial first step in the line of defense against unnecessary vision loss, especially in our most vulnerable populations. The results of this study help to identify the barriers of access to care and prove that more work needs to be done to overcome these barriers in all public health programs, not just in vision programs,” said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. “We want to thank the CDC, PFC, and the staff at Prevent Blindness Ohio for their dedicated leadership and partnership in helping us to address this important issue.”

The Barriers to Attending an Eye Examination after Vision Screening Referral within a Vulnerable Population” study can be found at <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/hpu/summary/v024/24.3.gower.html>. For more information on vision and eye health, contact Prevent Blindness America at (800) 331-2020 or visit preventblindness.org.

About Prevent Blindness America

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screening and training, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates and regional offices, Prevent Blindness America is committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call (800) 331-2020 or visit us on the Web at preventblindness.org.

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