

A Look at Women's Eye Health

>12M

Americans aged 40 and older are visually impaired or blind.

Vision impairment is one of the most common causes of disability in the United States, and the number of blind or visually impaired Americans is projected to double by 2050.

Women are disproportionately affected by some of the most common eye diseases. **Eye conditions can also present or affect women differently across the lifespan.** Some are linked to specific events like pregnancy and menopause, while others become increasingly common and burdensome with age. For most of these diseases, little is known about what causes them and treatments are limited, highlighting an increased need for research in the coming years, especially in women's eye health.

NOTABLE EYE CONDITIONS IN WOMEN

AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION (AMD)

- AMD is a **leading cause of vision loss** in America, resulting in loss of independence and reduced quality of life.
- 65% (1.35 million) of Americans with AMD are women. Prevalence of AMD is expected to more than double by 2050.



CATARACTS

- Cataracts are clouding of the cornea, leading to **reduced or blurred vision**. They are often associated with aging, but can also arise from other causes, including injury.
- 61% (12.8 million) of Americans with cataracts are women.



DIABETIC RETINOPATHY (DR)

- DR causes vision disturbances and is the **5th leading cause of blindness** worldwide.
- Individuals with type 1 or type 2 diabetes are at risk for DR, as well as pregnant women with gestational diabetes. Women with diabetes also tend to have worse outcomes than men.



DRY EYE DISEASE (DED)

- DED is a common condition where the eye doesn't produce enough tears or produces tears that dry too quickly, resulting in **discomfort, sensitivity to light, and occasional vision problems**.
- Women are **twice as likely** as men to have DED and typically experience more severe symptoms. DED affects more than **3 million women** and is more common after menopause.



GLAUCOMA

- Glaucoma is a buildup of pressure in the eye that damages the optic nerve, resulting in **vision loss**.
- 67% (1.8 million) of Americans with glaucoma are women.



THYROID EYE DISEASE (TED)

- TED is an **autoimmune condition** that causes inflammation and swelling of tissue in and around the eye. It can lead to inability to fully close the eye, double vision and, in severe cases, blindness.
- TED is about **5 to 6 times more common in women** than men and is often linked to other thyroid disorders, which are also much more prevalent in women.



COSTS AND IMPLICATIONS

\$47.4B

FOR GOVERNMENT ENTITIES

\$22.1B

FOR PRIVATE INSURERS

\$71.7B

FOR PATIENTS

- Ocular care represents about **7% of total Medicare expenses** (\$102 billion), the second highest cost specialty, and is growing at roughly 3 times the rate of overall costs.
- Vision impairment places a substantial burden on caregivers, which can be up to **94 hours per week**, depending on the severity of vision loss. Women, in addition to being the bulk of those suffering from vision loss, are also the bulk of those providing care.
- Vision loss leads to reduced mobility and independence, increased risk for injury, and greater risk for isolation and poor mental health, including depression.



POLICY ACTIONS TO IMPROVE WOMEN'S EYE HEALTH

- Build vision screening into regular care and maintenance for common health issues like diabetes, autoimmune diseases, pregnancy, menopause, and healthy aging.
- Ensure that women are able to engage in shared decision-making about what types of therapies and treatments are best for them by limiting step therapy and prior authorization of treatments and therapies for eye diseases.
- Institute and expand comprehensive, community-based programs to increase affordability and continuity of access to much-needed basic vision screening and care.
- Provide sustained funding increases for the NIH, including at least \$900 million for the National Eye Institute (NEI) in fiscal year 2022 — a \$64.3 million (7.7%) increase over fiscal year 2021.
- Ensure women and girls in all stages of life — especially pregnancy, postpartum, and menopause — are included in medical research on eye and vision conditions.
- Move the current research framework toward a population health approach that addresses women's eye health vulnerabilities and disparities and promotes equitable awareness and treatment.
- Expand Medicare coverage for vision care costs and safeguard coverage through Medicaid at the state level.

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