

Winter 2008



## Letter from the Chair of the NEHEP Planning Committee

On behalf of the members of the Planning Committee, I am pleased to introduce the electronic version of *Outlook*, the quarterly newsletter of the National Eye Health Education Program (NEHEP).


Beginning with this issue, *Outlook* launches a new format for communicating information relevant to the eye health education efforts of health professionals and community organizations in the field. This new web-based format is a focused and up-to-date method of sharing information on eye health education and disease prevention activities, new educational materials, and the community efforts of the NEHEP Partnership and others concerned with eye health education.

*Outlook* articles now contain links to related resources and, when relevant, contact information so that you can share ideas with the people who are working on projects of interest. You will see expanded graphics, informative articles, calendar events, and eye health-related activities of other organizations.

For those who may be new to NEHEP, this issue focuses on the mission, efforts, and organization of the Program. Because January is National Glaucoma Awareness Month, we also present recent findings from a national survey regarding public knowledge about the disease. We encourage you to let others know about this disease by distributing the NEI glaucoma materials and resources highlighted in "Glaucoma: What You Can Do to Make a Difference."

When warranted, we will share the dates of upcoming presentations and meetings related to our efforts to educate the public and health professionals about eye health and disease prevention.

### Educational Resource Spotlight: Medicare Benefit Card

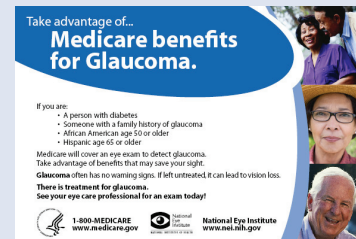


Take advantage of...  
**Medicare benefits for  
Diabetic Eye Disease.**

If you have diabetes, Medicare will help pay for eye exams. Take advantage of benefits that may save your sight.  
**Diabetic Eye Disease** can affect anyone with diabetes. It often has no symptoms or pain. If undetected, it can cause severe vision loss or blindness.  
**There is treatment for diabetic eye disease. See your eye care professional for an exam today!**

1-800-MEDICARE  
www.medicare.gov

National Eye Institute  
www.nei.nih.gov



Take advantage of...  
**Medicare benefits  
for Glaucoma.**

If you are:  
• A person with diabetes  
• Someone with a family history of glaucoma  
• African American age 50 or older  
• Hispanic age 40 or older  
Medicare will cover an eye exam to detect glaucoma. Take advantage of benefits that may save your sight.  
**Glaucoma often has no warning signs. If left untreated, it can lead to vision loss. There is treatment for glaucoma. See your eye care professional for an exam today!**

1-800-MEDICARE  
www.medicare.gov

National Eye Institute  
www.nei.nih.gov



Order this and other materials online at  
<http://catalog.nei.nih.gov/>.

### Healthy Vision Community Programs Database



Visit the Healthy Vision Community Programs Database! This easy-to-search resource can help you learn about new ways to address eye health issues and replicate eye health-related projects in your community.

We would also like to hear from you – our readers. We welcome your suggestions about future issues of *Outlook*, what articles you would like to see, and information you would like to share about your eye health efforts and events. Let us know how you and your organization have promoted NEHEP messages and used NEHEP materials. Contact us with your comments. Please forward this newsletter to others interested in making vision a national health priority.

We hope you enjoy the new format and we look forward to hearing from you!

**Eve Higginbotham, M.D.**

Chair, National Eye Health Education Program Planning Committee  
Dean and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs  
Morehouse School of Medicine  
Atlanta, GA



**Contact Us.**

Contact us. We want to hear from you! Send us your story ideas, eye health events, or articles you'd like to see in future issues of *Outlook* to [2020@nei.nih.gov](mailto:2020@nei.nih.gov).

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## **A Brief Look at the National Eye Health Education Program**

The National Eye Health Education Program (NEHEP) is pleased to introduce its premier issue of the *Outlook* electronic newsletter. The following is a quick reminder of the purpose and structure of NEHEP and all that it has to offer.



**National Eye Health  
Education Program  
NEHEP**

### **Background**

NEHEP was launched in 1991 by the National Eye Institute (NEI) to address the need for programs that encourage early detection and treatment of those at higher risk for developing an eye disease. The goal of NEHEP is to ensure that vision is a health priority and to translate eye and vision research into public and professional education programs. To accomplish this goal, the following objectives provide a framework for NEHEP activities:

- Create culturally appropriate, health-literate, and evidence-based education programs that address early detection, treatment, and low vision rehabilitation of eye diseases and disorders in all settings and life stages of high-risk populations.
- Build and sustain partnerships with organizations to implement eye health education programs.
- Provide leadership to Federal, state, and local government agencies and public- and private-sector organizations on eye health issues.
- Establish a research and evaluation base to facilitate development of effective program interventions.

NEHEP currently focuses on three main program areas: diabetic eye disease, glaucoma, and low vision. Specific goals and objectives for these programs are outlined in the NEHEP Five-Year Agenda. Work is in progress to develop education programs on age-related eye disease.

NEHEP has a wide variety of resources to support its programs. Materials are available for health professionals, patients, and the public. They include educational websites, brochures, and teaching guides; tools for download, such as public service announcements and ready-to-use articles to promote the importance of having regular comprehensive dilated eye exams; and planning and evaluation documents to help organizations incorporate eye health information into existing programs and events.

## **Organization**

NEHEP is supported by an advisory structure that consists of a Planning Committee and Partnership.

### **Planning Committee**

The NEHEP Planning Committee is composed of eye care professionals and experts in health education and health communication. Its responsibilities include recommending program priorities; advising the development, implementation, and evaluation of NEHEP activities; reviewing NEHEP materials and resources; recommending new opportunities for NEHEP to achieve its goals; and facilitating cooperation among the NEHEP Partnership. The collective experience and dedication of the Committee members helps to translate research findings into relevant NEHEP program strategies and resources that help make vision a health priority.

### **Partnership**

NEHEP works in partnership with more than 65 public and private organizations that have an interest in eye health or represent people who are at higher risk for eye disease. NEHEP works with these organizations to educate people about the importance of early detection and treatment of eye diseases and about increasing awareness of low vision rehabilitation services. Partnership organizations are a crucial link in the implementation of eye health education programs.

Partnership organizations are national organizations with local affiliates that agree to facilitate the coordination of activities and promote collaboration among NEHEP Partnership members; implement activities that will further the aims of NEHEP; and exchange information, views, and materials on eye health education. In return, NEHEP helps Partnership organizations bring valuable eye health information to their constituents.

The Partnership Directory contains brief descriptions and contact information for organizations involved in NEHEP. You may find it useful for connecting with other organizations and agencies that promote eye health.

NEHEP is committed to making vision a health priority for the Nation. Join us in spreading the word about the importance of early detection and timely treatment of eye disease. For more information about NEHEP, visit <http://www.nei.nih.gov/nehep>.

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## Glaucoma: Lack of Early Symptoms May Result in Unnecessary Vision Loss

Most people know that glaucoma can cause vision loss, and that vision loss may be minimized if treated early. However, few people know that glaucoma has no early warning signs, making treatment unlikely without early detection.



These are among the major findings of the *2005 Survey of Public Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Related to Eye Health and Disease* conducted by the National Eye Institute (NEI) and Lions Clubs International Foundation. Survey results are based on 3,180 phone interviews of people aged 18 and older in the United States.

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the worst, a large majority (71%) said they would consider losing their eyesight a 10, underscoring the high value people attach to sight.

Although 67 percent know vision loss from glaucoma can be prevented, the survey revealed a large gap between those who have heard of glaucoma (90%) and those who know it has no early symptoms (8%). Of those who have heard of glaucoma, 92 percent know it can cause vision loss.

The lack of warning signs that typically drive people to seek medical attention makes preventing vision loss associated with glaucoma particularly challenging.

Glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness and vision loss in the United States, affecting more than 4 million people nationwide, half of whom are unaware they have the disease. The number is likely to grow considerably as the nearly 47 million baby boomers age.

The National Eye Health Education Program at NEI is working to raise awareness about the lack of symptoms and the need for comprehensive dilated eye exams to detect glaucoma before vision loss occurs. Those at higher risk should have such an exam every one to two years. They include the following:

- African Americans over age 40
- Everyone over age 60 (especially Mexican Americans)
- People with a family history of glaucoma.

<sup>1</sup> Eye Diseases Prevalence Research Group. (2004). Prevalence of open-angle glaucoma among adults in the United States. *Archives of Ophthalmology*, 122, 532–538.

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# Glaucoma: What You Can Do to Make a Difference

Glaucoma has no warning signs. If left untreated, it can result in permanent vision loss or even blindness. Fortunately, a comprehensive dilated eye exam can detect glaucoma, and early detection may minimize vision loss. People at higher risk for glaucoma include African Americans over age 40, those over age 60, and those with a family history of the disease.

You can help raise public awareness about the need for dilated eye exams by distributing information to your family, friends, members, and mailing lists. NEI has a variety of materials in English and Spanish including public service announcements (PSAs), e-cards, brochures, videos, teaching resources for health professionals, and more. Single copies are free. There is a small shipping fee for bulk orders.



The following are a few examples of materials and ideas about how to use them. You can find them at <http://www.nei.nih.gov/glaucomaeducation>.

## Glaucoma E-cards

**What You Can Do:** Spread the word about the importance of dilated eye exams by sending e-cards. There are a variety to choose from and they can be personalized.

**How You Can Do It:** E-mail the cards to your own mailing list, including friends, family, and members of your organization. Place the glaucoma e card description and link on websites and in newsletters so others can send them.

## Glaucoma Education Website

**What You Can Do:** Show others a consumer-friendly site where they can learn about early detection, treatment, and follow-up care for glaucoma.

**How You Can Do It:** Post the link on your intranet or website. Include information about the website in e-mails and newsletters to your constituents.

## Radio Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

**What You Can Do:** Enlist the mass media. NEI offers a variety of downloadable audio PSAs and scripts about the importance of dilated eye exams.

**How You Can Do It:** Use our ready-made scripts to record PSAs that your organization can play on your hold line. Download an audio PSA and distribute to local radio stations.



## Medicare Benefit Card

**What You Can Do:** Help others to obtain the glaucoma and diabetic eye disease benefit under Medicare. The card contains information about benefit eligibility and where to learn more.

**How You Can Do It:** Distribute at health fairs, clinics, and other community locations. Place cards in your cafeteria or lunch room with a note to “Take one for someone you care about.”

For more ideas, look at *Educating Your Community about Glaucoma*. This resource, part of the Healthy Vision 2010 Toolkit, contains facts about glaucoma, activity suggestions, promotional materials, and a brochure. An electronic version is available at <http://www.nei.nih.gov/glaucomaeducation>.

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## HHS Releases Quick Guide to Health Literacy and Older Adults



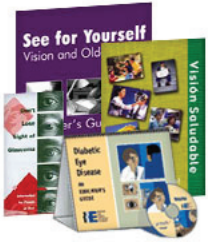
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently released a new health literacy tool for people who serve older adults. The *Quick Guide to Health Literacy and Older Adults* is designed to provide useful strategies and suggestions to help bridge the communication gap between professionals and older adults in an era when people are being asked to take a greater role in managing their health.

The *Quick Guide to Health Literacy and Older Adults* addresses special issues that apply to older adults including visual and hearing impairment, cognitive challenges, and the strengths of older adults. The nature of changes in cognition, for example, often leads to negative stereotypes about older adults. In fact, reduced processing speed, greater tendency to be distracted, and reduced capacity to process and remember new information at the same time are to be expected as people age. These changes are not signs of cognitive impairment. The Quick Guide offers several ways to address these changes such as emphasizing desired actions rather than actions to avoid, using plain language, and minimizing distractions.

Problems with health literacy affect millions of Americans, including older adults. More than 77 million U.S. adults have basic or below basic health literacy skills. Only 3 percent of the older adults surveyed were found to be proficient in health literacy based on the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy published by the U.S. Department of Education. Persons with limited health literacy have more adverse health outcomes including less frequent use of preventive services, higher hospitalization rates, and more emergency room visits. For older Americans, difficulties with health literacy can complicate already challenging health problems because as many as 80 percent of older Americans have at least one chronic disease. For more information, visit <http://www.health.gov/communication/literacy/olderadults>.

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## On the Road with NEHEP



NEHEP regularly exhibits at national meetings across the country. Exhibits provide an opportunity to share information and publications, promote NEHEP messages and resources, and strengthen links with other organizations. Upcoming NEHEP exhibits are listed below. If you plan to attend any of these meetings, please stop by and say “hello”!

### **2008 Annual Conference of the National Council on Aging (NCOA) and the American Society on Aging (ASA)**

“Aging in America”

March 26-30, 2008

Marriott Wardman Park Hotel (Expo Hotel)

Washington, D.C.

NEI Booth No. 515