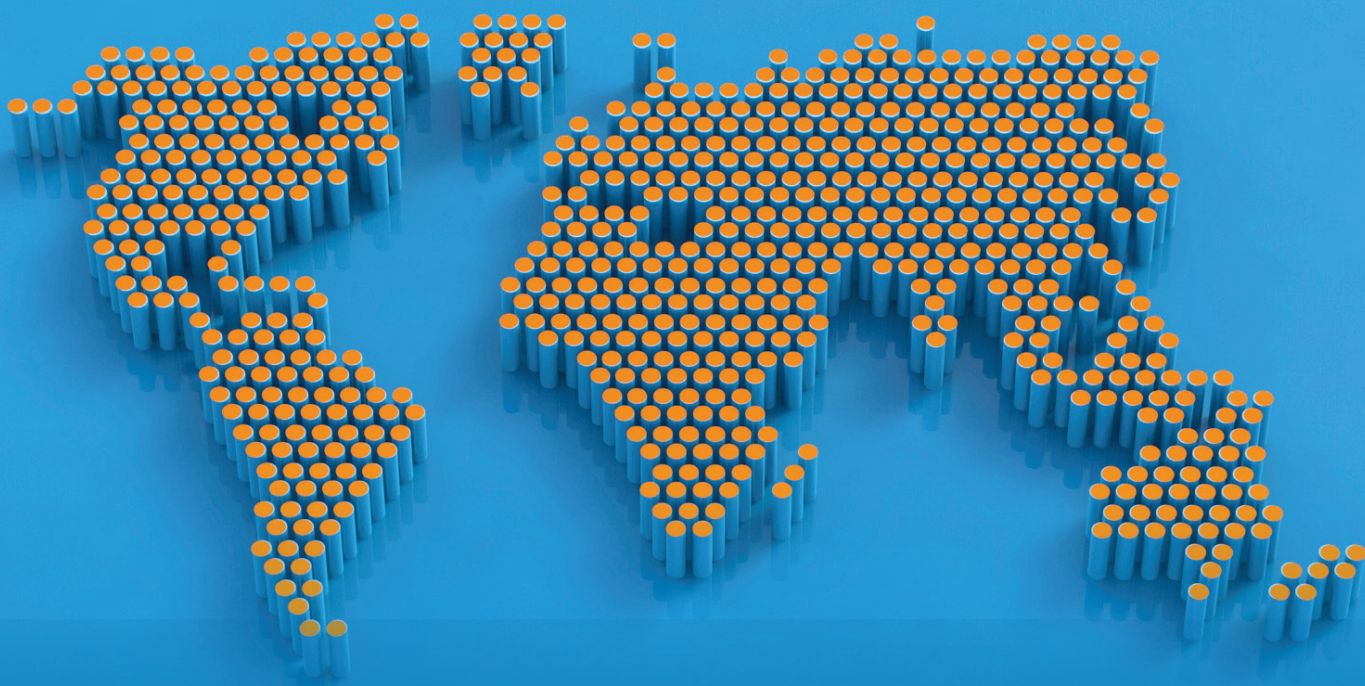


Universal eye health

A global action plan
2014–2019



World Health
Organization

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Foreword

The most recent WHO estimates on the global magnitude and causes of visual impairments confirm a major opportunity for change in the lives of millions of people: 80% of all causes of visual impairment are preventable or curable. WHO estimates that in 2010 there were 285 million people visually impaired, of which 39 million were blind. If just the two major causes of visual impairment were considered priorities and control measures were implemented consistently across the world, by providing refractive services and offering cataract surgery to the people in need, two thirds of the visually impaired people could recover good sight. This scenario appears to be fairly easy to realize, but for multiple reasons both the aforementioned eye diseases remain major items on the unfinished agenda of public eye care.

Provision of effective and accessible eye care services is key for effectively controlling visual impairment including blindness. The preference is given to strengthening eye care services through their integration into the health system rather than through their provision in the vertical programme approach. There is ample evidence that comprehensive eye care services need to become an integral part of primary health care and health systems development. While it is critical, as an example, for preventing visual impairment from diabetes and premature birth, it is true for the prevention and management of almost all causes of avoidable visual impairment. In the international work in the health sector in the last few years there has been an ever-increasing focus on health system development and increasing attention to the benefits that come from integrating competencies and specialities of the health sector. There is the potential to streamline health promotion for eye care alongside general health promotion initiatives. There are a number of proven risk factors for some major causes of blindness

supported by evidence (e.g. diabetes mellitus, smoking, premature birth, rubella, vitamin A deficiency) which need to be addressed where appropriate through a health sector-wide approach. A major opportunity will be in incorporating the prevention of visual impairment and rehabilitation agenda into wider health policies and strategies, including post-Millennium Development Goals global actions. Multisectoral action is also crucial for preventing a range of chronic eye conditions. This becomes increasingly critical as chronic eye diseases, the incidence of which increases with age, are the major cause of visual impairment and in the future it is anticipated that, along with the global ageing of the world population, their relevance and magnitude will grow.

The adoption of the global eye health action plan by the Sixty-sixth World Health Assembly opens a new opportunity for Member States to progress with their efforts to prevent visual impairment and strengthen rehabilitation of the blind in their communities. All stakeholders are requested to join in this renewed effort to translate the vision of the global eye health action plan which is a world in which nobody is needlessly visually impaired, where those with unavoidable vision loss can achieve their full potential, and where there is universal access to comprehensive eye care services.

Dr Oleg Chestnov

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Introduction

The global eye health action plan 2014–2019 aims to reduce avoidable visual impairment as a global public health problem and to secure access to rehabilitation services for the visually impaired. This should be achieved by expanding current efforts by Member States, the WHO Secretariat and international partners, improved coordination, efficient monitoring, focusing the use of resources towards the most cost-effective interventions, and developing innovative approaches to prevent and cure eye diseases.

Following the request of Member States at the Sixty-fifth World Health Assembly in 2011, the Secretariat, in close consultation with Member States and international partners, developed a draft action plan for the prevention of avoidable visual impairment for the period 2014–2019. The content and structure of the action plan was built on experiences in prevention of avoidable visual impairment gained through major international partnerships and alliances along with lessons learnt in implementing comprehensive eye health interventions at district and national levels. A major effort was made in engaging all stakeholders in the development of the action plan and stimulating their feedback on the draft through web-based consultations and consultative meetings convened by the Secretariat. The Sixty-sixth World Health Assembly endorsed the action plan by adopting resolution WHA66.4 entitled Towards universal eye health: a global action plan 2014–2019.

Actions for Member States, international partners and the Secretariat are structured around three objectives:

- objective 1 addresses the need for generating evidence on the magnitude and causes of visual impairment and eye care services and using it to monitor progress, identify priorities and advocate for greater political and financial commitment by Member States to eye health;
- objective 2 encourages the development and implementation of integrated national eye health policies, plans and programmes

to enhance universal eye health with activities in line with WHO's framework for action for strengthening health systems to improve health outcomes;

- objective 3 addresses multisectoral engagement and effective partnerships to strengthen eye health.

The global eye health action plan is based on five principles and approaches which underpin the plan: universal access and equity, human rights, evidence-based practice, a life course approach, and empowerment of people with visual impairment. As there have been significant shifts in the pattern of causes of visual impairment, the action plan is structured to particularly address the global trend towards an increasing incidence of chronic eye diseases related to ageing. These are expected to be the most prevalent causes of avoidable visual impairment in the next decades.

The global eye health action plan is built using the health system approach, which encompasses the integration of eye care programmes into the wider health care system at all levels (primary, secondary, and tertiary).

Effective international partnerships and alliances remain instrumental in delivering effective public health responses and in strengthening the prevention of visual impairment. The reduction of avoidable visual impairment depends also on progress in other health and development agendas, such as the development of comprehensive health systems, human resources for health development, improvements in the area of maternal, child and reproductive health, and the provision of safe water and basic sanitation. Eye health needs to be included in broader noncommunicable and communicable disease frameworks, and can substantially contribute in those global initiatives addressing ageing, marginalized and vulnerable groups.

By setting a global target for the action plan, Member States have agreed to jointly work towards the reduction in prevalence



of avoidable visual impairment by 25% by 2019 from the baseline established by WHO in 2010. The global eye health action plan provides Member States with a set of activities to strengthen their health systems in the area

of eye care. Member States are invited, in collaboration with international partners, to identify and implement those actions most appropriate to their own circumstances and needs.



Resolution of the Sixty-sixth World Health Assembly:

WHA66.4

Towards universal eye health: a global action plan 2014–2019

The Sixty-sixth World Health Assembly,

Having considered the report and draft global action plan 2014–2019 on universal eye health;¹

Recalling resolutions WHA56.26 on elimination of avoidable blindness and WHA62.1 and WHA59.25 on prevention of avoidable blindness and visual impairment;

Recognizing that the global action plan 2014–2019 on universal eye health builds upon the action plan for the prevention of avoidable blindness and visual impairment for the period 2009–2013;

Recognizing that globally, 80% of all visual impairment can be prevented or cured and that about 90% of the world's visually impaired live in developing countries;

Recognizing the linkages between some areas of the global action plan 2014–2019 on universal eye health and efforts to address noncommunicable diseases and neglected tropical diseases,

1. ENDORSES the global action plan 2014–2019 on universal eye health;

2. URGES Member States:

(3) to continue to implement the actions agreed by the World Health Assembly in resolution WHA62.1 on prevention of blindness and visual impairment and the action plan for the prevention of blindness and visual impairment for the period 2009–2013;

(4) to continue to support the work of the Secretariat to implement the current action plan to the end of 2013;

(5) to consider the programme and budget implications related to implementation of this resolution within the context of the broader programme budget;

3. REQUESTS the Director-General:

(1) to provide technical support to Member States for the implementation of the proposed actions in the global action plan 2014–2019 on universal eye health in accordance with national priorities;

(2) to further develop the global action plan 2014–2019 on universal eye health, in particular with regard to the inclusion of universal and equitable access to services;

(3) to continue to give priority to the prevention of avoidable visual impairment, including blindness, and

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