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Educating about the Value of Vision Research

For Immediate Release
Thursday, September 18, 2014

Contact: Anna Briseño/Research!America
571-482-2737
James Jorkasky/AEVR
240-221-2905
Matthew Levine/RPB
212-752-4333

New Public Opinion Poll Reveals a Significant Number of Americans Rate Losing Eyesight as Having Greatest Impact on their Lives Compared to Other Conditions

Comprehensive attitudinal survey on eye health shows differences among groups; underscores critical need for funding research

ALEXANDRIA, Va.—Sept. 18, 2014—Many Americans across racial and ethnic groups describe losing eyesight as potentially having the greatest impact on their day-to-day life, more so than other conditions including: loss of limb, memory, hearing and speech (57% of African-Americans, 49% of non-Hispanic whites, 43% of Asians and 38% of Hispanics). When asked which disease or ailment is the worst that could happen to them, blindness ranked first among African-Americans followed by AIDS/HIV. Hispanics and Asians ranked cancer first and blindness second, while Alzheimer’s disease ranked first among non-Hispanic whites followed by blindness.

When asked about various possible consequences of vision loss, “quality of life” ranked as the top concern by non-Hispanic whites (73%) and Asians (68%) while African-Americans (66%) and Hispanics (63%) ranked “loss of independence” as number one. These and other findings from a new national [public opinion poll](#) commissioned by Research!America and the Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (AEVR) point to various perspectives among racial and ethnic groups regarding eye and vision health.

“Every segment of the population has major concerns about the impact of eye disorders on quality of life,” said Mary Woolley, president and CEO of Research!America. “Individuals realize the importance of good eye health in maintaining productive lives and fear its loss. But the reality is that advances in the prevention and treatment of eye disorders will not be possible without stronger investments in research.”

National support of research that focuses on improving the prevention and treatment of eye and vision disorders is considered a priority among a strong majority of respondents (83% of African-Americans and non-Hispanic whites, 80% of Asians and 79% of Hispanics). When told that the federal government spends on average \$2.10 per person each year on such research, half of African-Americans (51%) and Hispanics (50%) say this is not enough followed by non-Hispanic whites (47%) and Asians (35%). About half of all groups believe that non-governmental sectors - industry, patient groups and philanthropies - should also increase funding for eye and vision research (57% of Hispanics, 51% of African-Americans, 49% of Asians and 47% of non-Hispanic whites).

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Knowledge about specific eye disorders was uneven among populations. More than half of all groups have heard of cataracts and glaucoma but fewer were aware of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and diabetic eye disease. Hispanics (35%) and Asians (31%) are more likely to say they have not heard of these conditions compared to 22% of non-Hispanic whites and African-Americans.

As for causes of eye disorders, a majority of all respondents (80% of non-Hispanic whites, 77% of Hispanics, 76% of Asians and 70% of African-Americans) believe that excessive sunlight or ultraviolet radiation is a risk factor for eye disease along with ethnic heritage (64% of Asians, 60% of non-Hispanic whites, 59% of Hispanics and 52% of African-Americans). Chronic exposure of eyes to sunlight can cause cataracts and macular degeneration as well as eye irritation. Minority groups are often at a higher risk for vision impairment and blindness due to higher rates of certain eye conditions such as glaucoma, cataract and diabetic retinopathy.

More than half of Asians (57%), Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites (52%) and a plurality of African-Americans (42%) agree that obesity is also associated with greater risk for eye disease, and 62% of Hispanics, 60% of Asians, 54% of non-Hispanic whites and 48% of African-Americans agree smoking is a risk factor. Research has shown the risks of AMD, diabetic retinopathy, cataract and glaucoma increase with obesity-related systemic diseases such as diabetes or a high body mass index (BMI), abdominal circumference or waist-hip ratio. Smoking also increases the risk of AMD, cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and chronic dry eye.

Looking ahead, many respondents believe health care costs from eye disorders will increase by the year 2050 (62% of non-Hispanic whites, 58% of Asians, 54% of Hispanics and 50% of African-Americans). A June 2014 report by Prevent Blindness estimates that the total cost of vision disorders is expected to reach \$717 billion in 2050 compared to the current annual cost of \$145 billion.

<http://preventblindness.org/cost-vision-problems-reach-717-billion-2050>

The poll, conducted by Zogby Analytics in August 2014 and supported by a grant from Research to Prevent Blindness (RPB), is a rigorous attitudinal survey among non-Hispanic whites and minority populations about eye health and research. The margin of error for the sample sizes range from +/-3.2 to +/-5.8 percentage points. To view the poll, visit: www.researchamerica.org/uploads/AEVRRApoll.pdf. Read new [fact sheet](#) on cost and prevalence of vision and blindness in the U.S.

“AEVR thanks Research to Prevent Blindness for supporting this poll, which builds upon the first-ever attitudinal survey it conducted fifty years ago in 1965 and updated in 1976 and 1988,” said James Jorkasky, executive director of AEVR. “Although vision loss remains top-of-mind, we must continue to educate and advocate for research, especially due to an increasing at-risk aging population, vision disorders resulting from chronic diseases, and the disproportionate incidence of eye disease in growing minority populations.”

Among other findings:

- About half of all respondents say they would likely participate in a clinical trial for eye and vision research if recommended by a health care provider (52% of non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics, 49% of Asians and 48% of African-Americans).
- About half of all respondents say they have insurance coverage for routine eye exams or glasses (56% of Asians, 54% of Hispanics, 50% of non-Hispanic whites and 48% of African-Americans).

- A third of all respondents say they have eye exams less frequently than they would like because of their insurance situation (31% of African-Americans, 31% of Hispanics, and 29% of Asians and non-Hispanic whites).
- A strong majority of all respondents (90% of non-Hispanic whites, and 84% of African-Americans, Hispanics and Asians) agree that good eye health is important to overall health.

About Research!America polls

Research!America began commissioning polls in 1992 in an effort to understand public support for medical, health and scientific research. The results of Research!America's polls have proven invaluable to our alliance of member organizations and, in turn, to the fulfillment of our mission to make research to improve health a higher national priority. In response to growing usage and demand, Research!America has expanded its portfolio, which includes state, national and issue-specific polling. Visit www.researchamerica.org.

About Research!America

Research!America is the nation's largest nonprofit public education and advocacy alliance working to make research to improve health a higher national priority. Founded in 1989, Research!America is supported by member organizations representing 125 million Americans. Visit www.researchamerica.org.

About the Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (AEVR)

AEVR, a 501c3 non-profit educational foundation comprised of 55 member organizations including professional societies in ophthalmology and optometry, patient and consumer groups and industry, serves as the privately-funded "Friends of the National Eye Institute (NEI)." In 2009, Congress passed H. Res. 366 and S. Res. 209 to recognize the 40th anniversary of the NEI and designate 2010-2020 as the "decade of vision." AEVR's *Decade of Vision 2010-2020 Initiative* is a sustained educational effort to inform policymakers, patients, and the media about the benefits of federally funded vision research. Visit www.eyersearch.org.

About Research to Prevent Blindness (RPB)

Research to Prevent Blindness seeks to preserve and restore vision by supporting research to develop treatments, preventives and cures for *all* conditions that damage and destroy sight. Within this mission is a commitment to grow and nurture a robust and diverse vision research community. Since it was founded in 1960 by Dr. Jules Stein, RPB has awarded over \$320 million in research grants to the most talented vision scientists at the nation's leading medical schools. The flexible nature of RPB grants fosters groundbreaking findings by funding innovative, out-of-the-box research and by giving researchers the freedom to pursue emerging discoveries. As a result, RPB has been associated with nearly every major breakthrough in the understanding and treatment of vision loss in the past 50 years. Visit www.rpbusa.org.

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