

Vision Health in Canada

National Coalition for Vision Health

4 Aylesbury Road * Toronto, ON * M9A 2M4 * 416-480-5091

Prevalence & Incidence

- Vision loss is the most feared disability for Canadians (69%).¹
- Canadian 64+ population will double from 4.6 million in 2010 to 9.2 million by 2031.²
- 4 million + Canadian adults have one of the leading ocular diseases...all are age related.³
- Within the next 20 years the number of Canadians with vision loss is expected to double.³
- Over 75% of vision loss is preventable.⁴

Financial Burden of Vision Loss

- In terms of direct health-related costs, vision loss ranked higher in 2007 than any disease category in Canada.⁵
- The financial burden of vision loss in Canada in 2007 was estimated at \$15.8 billion. By 2032, vision loss is expected to cost Canadians \$30.3 billion.⁶

Funding Vision Research

- It was estimated that \$10 million was spent by CIHR on vision health research in 2006. This amounts to \$92 for every legally blind Canadian. If vision health research were to be given funding based on economic burden of illness, in the same fashion as other disciplines, it would be \$28 million.⁷
- In comparison, the \$700 million annual budget of the National Eye Institute in the US, where a similar proportion of the population is legally blind, works out to approximately \$538 for each legally blind American.⁶
- The CIHR has largely based its funding priorities on the 1998 “Economic Burden of Illness in Canada” report (pg. 66). Vision loss was not recognized as a ‘Diagnostic Category’, yet its financial burden and prevalence of contributory eye diseases (AMD, glaucoma, cataracts, and diabetic retinopathy) warrants specific attention. There is no institute in Canada with vision as a priority nor is there protected budgets for vision research.

As Dr. Eugene Lechelt, Chairman and Professor Emeritus at the University of Alberta stated,
“We know where we will be in 20 years; our weakness will be failing to act on this knowledge.”⁵

¹ Environics Research Group 2003

² www.statscan.gc.ca

³ A Clear Vision: Solutions to Canada’s Vision Loss Crisis, Canterbury Communications 2005

⁴ CNIB

⁵ Environmental Scan of Vision Health and Vision Loss in the Provinces and Territories of Canada, NCVH 2009

⁶ The Cost of Vision Loss, 2009, CNIB & COS

⁷ Foundations for a Canadian Vision Health Strategy, NCVH January 2007

Why INMHA (Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction)?

Vision health research is the gateway to addressing the bleak outlook for vision loss in the next 20-30 years. A national vision action plan is the means to the ultimate goal of reducing preventable vision loss. Vision research will play a critical role to provide the support to justify a national vision action plan, and an ongoing key role as part of that initiative. Critical elements such as health human resources in the vision health field, developing better treatments, and improving the evidence base for practice will be instrumental in dealing with the vision loss levels expected.

There is congruence between the NCVH (National Coalition for Vision Health) objective for a national vision action plan and INMHA's mission which includes supporting research to enhance vision and to reduce the burden of vision disorders through prevention strategies, screening, diagnosis, treatment, and support systems.

Vision health needs to receive a higher priority in healthcare discussions pertaining to research, prevention strategies, legislation, and funding. Research is critically important given the demographic trends and the doubling of vision loss incidences that the aging population is expected to experience. With 75% of vision loss preventable, research will provide the foundation for identifying ways in which we can reduce the incidences of vision loss. Governments and decision makers will not act unless solutions being advocated are evidenced based. Research is needed to help identify solutions that address the vision health needs of Canadians in the next 20-30 years.

How can NCVH assist INMHA?

- Be catalysts for Knowledge Translation
- Help develop strategic initiatives
- Identify areas for research focus
- Citizen engagement assistance
- Influence public policy
- Public health education

On August 15, we would like to discuss how INMHA and NCVH can work together to:

- *Increase awareness and priority of vision health within INMHA*
- *Increase support for vision health research*

Some suggestions for consideration include:

- Incorporate 'Vision' into INMHA's title – "Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health, Addiction and Vision"
- Make 'vision' a standing agenda topic at INMHA meetings
- Provide consistent representation of vision research on INMHA Institute advisory board
- Create an annual funding envelope for vision research to help focus and coordinate vision research
- Increase funding for vision research to align it with the economic burden represented by vision loss
- Give vision the same opportunities for funding as neuroscience, mental health, and addiction.

Efforts such as these send strong signals to other health care and government organizations that vision is important. The desire of NCVH is to work together to help INMHA achieve its objectives and tackle vision health needs. With INMHA's resources and support, significant social impacts can be achieved to reduce the 75% of vision loss that is preventable.