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VISION-USA- THE WISCONSIN PROJECT OFFERS FREE EXAMS TO UNINSURED CHILDREN
Wisconsin Optometric Association supports program despite economic challenges of current economy

At a time in our history when many Americans are forgoing doctor's visits due to the financial climate, the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) continues to offer comprehensive eye care services to children from uninsured, low-income families through its program, VISION USA- The Wisconsin Project.

"Of the 22 million children in the United States under age 5, only 14 percent of them have had an eye exam," said Dr. Steve Drake, chair of VISION USA and member of the WOA. "Since 80 percent of a child's early learning comes from vision, eye exams are essential to a child's academic, physical and social development."

VISION USA offers comprehensive eye exams to uninsured children from working families. According to the WOA, the program is organized to provide optometric care to those patients with a minimum of paperwork and intrusion into their financial situation.

Established in 1989, VISION USA has provided 11,445 comprehensive exams to Wisconsin children in its 20 year history; conducting 72 exams in 2009. Participating eye doctors and members of the WOA agree to provide their services to approved children at no cost. Whenever possible, VISION USA will work with local eye doctors, manufacturers and service organizations, such as the Lions Club and Wisconsin Rotary, to provide prescription glasses if needed.

"Optometry is a service profession," said Drake. "We are intimately involved with the care of our patients. Not all of our patients are able to pay for that service. The VISION USA program addresses this important need."

Comprehensive eye exams from eye doctors detect more than vision screenings that children may receive throughout their academic career. While screenings may assess distance vision challenges, they cannot evaluate the overall health of a child's visual system nor can they reduce the risk of future learning problems associated with undetected vision and eye health conditions.

To be eligible for the program, children must be under 18 years of age, enrolled in school, and one parent or guardian must be working at least part-time. Patients must have no eye health insurance or history of a vision exam within the last 12 months. Additionally, family income must be below an established level according to house size, as indicated by a tax return or verification from the child's school that they qualify for free or reduced lunch.

"I am proud to be a member of a professional association committed to a program that ensures all Wisconsin youth have the chance to see clearly," said Drake. "The cooperation between Wisconsin optometrists, service organizations and optical labs are key to the program's success."

For more information, or to see if you are eligible to schedule an exam for your child, call VISION USA at 1-877-435-2020.