



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**FEBRUARY IS NATIONAL LOW VISION AWARENESS MONTH
*Protect Your Independence***

Low vision; what does that mean? According to the National Eye Institute, low vision is a visual impairment, not corrected by standard glasses, contact lenses, medicine, or surgery, and it interferes with the ability of approximately 14 million Americans to perform everyday activities. The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) and its member doctors are eager to bring attention to the negative impact low vision can have on millions of Americans and educate those same individuals about ways to improve their day to day lives. One big way to do this is for the WOA and its national association the American Optometric Association (AOA) to recognize February as National Low Vision Awareness Month.

Most people develop low vision because of eye diseases such as cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, or age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which is the leading cause of visual impairment in Caucasians over 50 years of age in the United States. While lost vision usually cannot be restored, it does not have to mean loss of independence or quality of life. According to Dr. Lisa Slaby, 2011 WOA President, "Early diagnosis by an eye doctor is very important in treating low vision and preventing it from progression, especially if you have glaucoma, cataracts, diabetes, or AMD." WOA doctors encourage all adults, especially those who are noticing even slight changes in their vision, to visit their eye doctor each year as a preventative measure. "Being proactive about your eye health is an important step in preserving the future of your sight and your freedom," says Dr. Slaby.

The WOA recommends, in addition to visiting your eye doctor on a routine basis, that everyone wear 99%-100% UV-blocking sunglasses, quit smoking, and practice a healthy lifestyle including proper diet and exercise. Following these suggestions as well as taking antioxidant vitamins such as vitamins C, E, A and Zinc may also help reduce your risk of vision loss.

"Low vision does not have to diminish a person's quality of life," says Dr. Slaby. There are many low vision aids and resources available, as well as continuous research and treatments. The Wisconsin Optometric Association, along with many other organizations, recognizes February as Low Vision Awareness Month.

If you have any questions, please contact the Wisconsin Optometric Association at 608.824.2200 or visit <http://www.woa-eyes.org> for a list of licensed optometrists in your area.

The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 650 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA's Web site at www.woa-eyes.org.