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### **Older Americans Forgoing Precautions to Prevent Age-Related Eye Diseases**

*Many Americans misunderstand macular degeneration, glaucoma and other diseases which require pre-emptive care*

**MILWAUKEE, WIS.** – The **Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA)** urges older Americans to be proactive about their eye health. According to new information from the American Optometric Association's (AOA) annual American Eye-Q® survey, one in three respondents aged 55 or older report not taking any steps to cope with age-related eye and vision problems.

“While they may seem minor, some vision changes occurring with age are symptoms of serious diseases which can lead to permanent vision loss,” warns Dr. Marcus Neitzke, WOA president and Milwaukee optometrist. “The possibility of developing glaucoma, macular degeneration or cataracts increases with age and will cause permanent damage if not diagnosed and treated early and properly.”

Often, changes in vision are noticeable around age 40. Those age-related changes may include difficulty seeing things close up, far away or in low light. Additionally, individuals may notice sensitivity to light and glare, distorted images, loss of central or side vision, or a difficulty in distinguishing between shades of colors.

Some age-related vision issues can be easily addressed with the help of a doctor of optometry, who can work with patients to prescribe wetting eye drops or artificial tears, or prescribing glasses and/or contacts. Optometrists may also suggest using brighter lights and limiting night-time driving.

Age-related eye diseases and disorders baby boomers and seniors should be aware of include:

- Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) – an eye disease causing loss of central vision
- Diabetic retinopathy – a condition occurring in people with diabetes, which causes progressive damage to the retina, the light-sensitive lining at the back of the eye
- Cataracts – a cloudy or opaque area in the clear lens of the eye
- Glaucoma – a group of eye diseases characterized by damage to the optic nerve resulting in peripheral vision loss
- Dry eye – a condition where there is an insufficient amount of tears or a poor quality of tears to lubricate and nourish the eye

According to the AOA's 2010 American Eye-Q® survey, only 15 percent of respondents know macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness in adults. The survey also found more than half of respondents (56 percent) incorrectly believe glaucoma is preventable, when in fact it may be treatable if caught early. Additionally, less than four in ten correctly identified health conditions such as high cholesterol or heart disease as impacting vision and eye health.

“A comprehensive eye exam by a doctor of optometry can help with early detection and treatment of vision disorders so many patients can preserve their vision and maintain a good quality, independent lifestyle,” said Dr. Bonsett-Veal.

The WOA recommends visiting a doctor of optometry on a regular basis for comprehensive eye exams to help ensure eye health and vision. The AOA guidelines suggest adults age 60 and under have a comprehensive eye exam every two years and then annually thereafter. To find an optometrist near you, use the doctor finder on the WOA website at [www.woa-eyes.org](http://www.woa-eyes.org).

#### **About the Wisconsin Optometric Association**

*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 and certified to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. The WOA also maintains an affiliation with the American Optometric Association (AOA). For more information, visit WOA's Web site at [www.woa-eyes.org](http://www.woa-eyes.org).*

#### **About the survey:**

*The fifth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From April 14-21, 2010, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,007 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of U.S. general population (margin of error at 95 percent confidence level).*

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