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For Further Information, Contact:  
David Bobka, WOA Director of Communications  
Email: [david@woa-eyes.org](mailto:david@woa-eyes.org)  
Phone: 608.824.2200

## PROTECT YOUR INDEPENDENCE: FEBRUARY IS NATIONAL LOW VISION AWARENESS MONTH

*The Wisconsin Optometric Association encourages those affected by low vision to be proactive*

**MADISON, WI** – What does “low vision” really mean? According to the National Eye Institute (NEI), low vision is a visual impairment, not corrected by standard glasses or contact lenses, which interferes with the ability of millions of Americans and that of about 135 million people worldwide to perform everyday activities. The **Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA)** and its member doctors are eager to bring attention to the difficulties low vision can place on quality of life for those affected and educate those same individuals about ways to improve their day-to-day lives. Therefore, the WOA, along with the American Optometric Association (AOA), recognizes February as National Low Vision Awareness Month.

The most recent American Eye-Q® survey conducted by the American Optometric Association (AOA) reveals that U.S. adults are indeed quite concerned about the potential for vision loss as it relates to their quality of life. When asked as to which physical ability they worry most about losing, over half of all adults surveyed answered “vision.” Vision loss ranked about 20 percent above memory loss and far above the loss of physical mobility and hearing. Adults who were concerned about developing serious vision problems most feared becoming unable to live independently, with 44 percent of those surveyed expressing this sentiment.

A majority of people develop low vision because of eye diseases such as cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, or age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which accounts for almost 45 percent of all low vision cases and is the leading cause of blindness in American adults. Visual impairment at any age can decrease an individual’s mobility and self-esteem. Although lost vision usually cannot be restored, it does not have to mean loss of independence or a reduced quality of life.

According to Dr. Kellye Knueppel, 2013 WOA President and Milwaukee and Madison area optometrist, “Early diagnosis by an eye doctor is very important in treating low vision and preventing it from progressing, 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,” asserts Dr. Knueppel.

In addition to visiting your eye doctor on a routine basis, the WOA recommends everyone practice a healthy, smoke-free lifestyle including proper diet and exercise. Following these suggestions along with taking the antioxidant 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,” affirms Dr. Knueppel. There are many low vision aids and resources available as well as continuous research and treatments. See your eye doctor for a comprehensive eye exam today.

If you have any questions, please contact the Wisconsin Optometric Association at 608-824-2200 or visit [www.woa-eyes.org](http://www.woa-eyes.org) for a list of licensed optometrists in your area.

### **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. Over 630 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 website at [www.woa-eyes.org](http://www.woa-eyes.org).*

### **About the American Eye-Q® survey:**

*The seventh annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From May 9 - 16, 2012, using an online methodology, PSB conducted 1,009 online interviews among Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of the U.S. general population (Margin of error at 95 percent confidence level).*