

Support Vision Foundations

Today, hundreds of organizations work to fight vision loss around the world. Thanks, in part, to their efforts, the global prevalence of moderate to severe visual impairment decreased from 3% to 1.9% from 1990 to 2010.¹ However, access to vision care remains problematic, even in the United States. As a society, we rely on charitable organizations to address the visual needs of our most vulnerable.

When COVID-19 began to spread, the work of organizations that fight vision loss suffered. Many optical laboratories were deemed nonessential, and school vision programs were cancelled. Free or reduced-cost sight-saving procedures were postponed indefinitely. The effects went beyond delivery of care, devastating the very foundation of these organizations. Funding that had often been procured through community outreach and grants was redirected toward COVID relief.

Even so, these organizations remained true to their missions. For example, in northeast Ohio, Sight for All United, with which we are affiliated, was able to collaborate with national organizations like Essilor Vision Foundation and optical providers like Classic Optical Laboratories to distribute over 100,000 pieces of PPE, including goggles and face masks, to frontline workers and first responders.

Now hoping to return to a semblance of normality, charitable organizations are rethinking the way they operate. In an era of virtual education, school-based vision programs will be nearly impossible to implement. For programs focused on adults, those who are at highest risk for vision loss may now be less likely to seek vision services. Further, many providers are facing financial difficulties of their own and may be less capable of seeing those referred from charitable organizations.²

As ophthalmology practices transition back to normal patient care, providers must remain cognizant of the immense vision need that exists in their communities and the essential role that these charitable organizations play. As a community, we must continue to support these foundations and help those affected by vision loss.

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1 Stevens GA et al. *Ophthalmology*. 2013;120(12):2377-2384.

2 Parke DW. *JAMA Ophthalmol*. 2020;138(6):599-600.