

Connecting healthy ageing and vision

Report summary

Authors:

Vânia de la Fuente-Núñez,
Katrina Bouzanis and
Sharon Joseph



The **Fred Hollows**
Foundation



International
Federation on
Ageing

a contribution to the
Decade
of **healthy**
ageing

Report summary

The report *Connecting healthy ageing and vision* brings together the vision and ageing sectors to align efforts and join forces to improve the health and quality of life of older people. With the world's population ageing at a rapid rate, collaborative action is imperative. An estimated 73% of people living with avoidable vision impairment are older people; that is 800 million people globally. This number will increase as the population ages, reaching 1.28 billion people by 2050. Age-related eye conditions, including cataracts and glaucoma, are already leading causes of vision impairment and blindness. Existing health and social disparities contribute to the burden of vision impairment for older people, especially for older women and disadvantaged groups. Vision is an integral component of an individual's capacity and deficits in vision have wide-ranging impacts on individuals, economies, and society at large. Therefore, eye health is instrumental to advancing healthy ageing.

The impact of vision loss on healthy ageing

Vision loss is linked to worse physical and mental health



MORTALITY

Older people with severe vision impairment or blindness face an increased mortality risk.



CO-MORBID CONDITIONS

Vision loss is associated with the presence of co-morbid chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease and hearing impairment.



LIMITED SELF-CARE

Older people with vision loss find it more challenging to engage in self-care (e.g., physical activity, attending medical appointments).



COGNITIVE DECLINE

Vision loss is associated with accelerated cognitive decline and dementia in older people.



DEPRESSION

Older people with visual impairments face an increased risk of depression.



SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

Vision loss is associated with reduced social activity and loneliness in older people.



FALLS

Older people with vision impairments are more likely to fall than those without vision loss.

Vision loss can affect functional ability



STAYING MOBILE

Increasing levels of vision impairment in older people can make it difficult to walk, navigate, drive and access public transportation.



MEETING BASIC NEEDS

Vision loss can exacerbate poverty through unaffordable health care and a lack of employment opportunities, making it difficult for older people to meet basic needs.



CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIETY

Vision loss can impact a person's ability to engage in employment or volunteering and caring for family members and the wider community.



LEARNING, GROWING & MAKING DECISIONS

Older people with vision loss can face barriers to accessing information and educational opportunities.



DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Social interactions can be more challenging for older people with vision loss, making it difficult to develop and maintain relationships.

Vision loss impacts economies and society at large



ECONOMIC LOSS

Vision loss contributes to productivity losses when older people with vision impairments are not able to work.



CAREGIVER BURDEN

Caregivers of people with vision loss, usually women and girls, may experience anxiety and depression and lose opportunities to go to school or earn a living.

Key actions to advance eye health in older age

Vision loss and its negative consequences can largely be avoided in older age through dedicated efforts to maximize the functional ability of the older person within their environment.

Vision can be preserved and protected in older age through addressing risk factors and screening for eye conditions that can avoid irreversible vision loss and ensure timely treatment.

Treatment and management of eye conditions can restore or slow progression towards vision impairment. Integrated care can enable timely detection and management of declines in capacity in older people (including visual capacity) through comprehensive assessments and personalized care plans. This model of care requires reorienting services towards primary care, training the health workforce and creating multidisciplinary teams, limiting out-of-pocket expenditures to access care, building strong referral pathways to specialized care, and ensuring that essential equipment is available.

Rehabilitation services and assistive technologies (e.g., eye glasses, braille devices) as well as environmental interventions (e.g., accessible infrastructure, clear signage in public spaces) can ensure that people with vision loss can maintain a high level of function.

The UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) offers an opportunity to bridge gaps between the vision and ageing agendas to improve the eye health and quality of life of older people. It can help deliver Integrated Care for Older People (ICOPE) to achieve better health outcomes; create age-friendly environments that address the needs and preferences of older people with vision loss; address ageism and intersecting forms of disadvantage that prevent older people from accessing the eye care and support they need; and prioritize eye health in long-term care to ensure equal access for all.

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The Fred Hollows Foundation is a leading international development organisation working towards a world in which no person is needlessly blind or vision impaired. Established in Australia in 1992, the Foundation now works in more than 25 countries and has restored sight to more than 3 million people worldwide.

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The International Federation on Ageing is an international non-governmental organization with a membership base of NGOs, industry, academia, government, and individuals. IFA aims to drive the agenda of the world's ageing populations and envisions a world of healthy older people whose rights and choices are protected and respected.

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