

You're Not Alone: Help is Available for Older Adults with Vision Loss

Until recently, we didn't have much concrete data on the impact vision loss is having on aging adults across Wisconsin. We could estimate how many people in the state are blind and visually impaired, and we had plenty of anecdotal information about how vision loss is affecting their well-being. But the numbers to back up those stories were missing.

That changed with the publication last year of "Wisconsin's Older Population and Vision Loss: A Briefing," a detailed report prepared by researchers from The Ohio State University College of Optometry and published by VisionServe Alliance, a national network of leaders and organizations working to transform the lives of people living with blindness and low vision.

We now have a much clearer understanding of the impact of vision loss among Wisconsin's older adults. The report tells us not only how common it is, but also what groups are more likely to be affected. We can also better grasp the connection between vision loss and physical, mental and social health.

Here are a few of the facts from the report:

Who Has Vision Loss?

- More than 4 out of every 100 older people in Wisconsin report severe vision impairment or blindness.
- Women over 65 in Wisconsin are significantly more likely than men to experience vision impairment.
- African Americans over 65 in Wisconsin are more than three times as likely to experience vision impairment as their White peers.

- Vision impairment rates vary widely across Wisconsin counties, with high rates found among both urban and rural counties.
- The vast majority of older people with vision impairment do not receive vision rehabilitation services to help them adapt to their changing vision.
- Older adults with vision loss are much more likely to be living in poverty than their peers who are not visually impaired.

What's the Connection Between Vision Loss and Health?

- Older people with vision impairment are more likely to have chronic conditions like stroke, arthritis, diabetes and kidney disease, and are twice as likely to suffer from depression.
- More than half of older people with vision impairment in Wisconsin report fair or poor health, compared to only 20% of older people without vision impairment.

So, what does all this mean for you? Above all, it means that if you are experiencing vision loss, you are not alone! It's very common to feel more isolated and lonely as your vision declines, so it's important to understand that (1) others in your community are going through the same thing; and (2) services are available that can help you feel more independent and empower you to continue with many of the activities you enjoy.

Practicing good eye health and seeing your eye doctor regularly will help preserve your vision as long as possible. It will ensure that your eye condition is diagnosed properly and you know your treatment options. If vision loss has begun to affect your day-to-day life, please consider reaching out to the nearest organization that provides vision rehabilitation services, which can teach you strategies for daily living. They can help you determine if vision rehab or other related services are right for you:

Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired (based in Madison)

800-783-5213

Info@WCBlind.org

WCBlind.org

Vision Forward Association (based in Milwaukee)

414-615-0100

Info@Vision-Forward.org

Vision-Forward.org/

Wisconsin Department of Health Services

Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired (statewide)

888-879-0017

DHSOBVI@DHS.Wisconsin.gov

DHS.Wisconsin.Gov/OBVI

Lighthouse Center for Vital Living (based in Duluth, MN)

218-624-4828

Info@Lcfvi.org

Lcfvi.org

The report "Wisconsin's Older Population and Vision Loss: A Briefing" is available online at Bit.ly/WisconsinBigDataReport.

Changing vision can be frightening, but with the right information and support, you can continue to live a vibrant and fulfilling life!