

European Forum
Against Blindness



E F A B



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Loss of sight is a primary concern for ageing Europeans as new expert forum states that a large proportion of blindness is preventable

E-FAB (European Forum Against Blindness) marks World Sight Day with a call to prevent avoidable blindness which remains a significant problem in Europe

A new survey of over 5,000 people across five EU countries reveals a level of concern and perceived need for better vision care services

Brussels, 10 October, 2012 – Today, as part of World Sight Day 2012, a survey across five EU countries reveals that over twice as many people are most concerned about developing sight loss compared to developing other conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and respiratory disease. In the survey, loss of vision was revealed as the primary health concern of ageing after memory loss. E-FAB (European Forum Against Blindness) has published the survey results to highlight that many Europeans are still needlessly losing their sight, and more needs to be done to diagnose vision problems earlier.

To be discussed at a Parliamentary Roundtable, jointly hosted by MEPs and a grouping of patient and professional organisations called E-FAB (European Forum Against Blindness), the survey showed the scale of concern about preventable blindness and vision loss among the public. Over half (53%) of the respondents said that they are worried about vision loss and blindness as they age, and that health systems should dedicate more resources to preventing vision loss.

“The results from the survey confirm that many people rank vision loss and preventable blindness as a major personal health concern and this is reasonable as we know that the risk of blindness from retinal conditions is increasing. Almost two thirds of people in the survey stated that late diagnosis and lack of regular eye tests are major barriers to detection, which suggests that we still need more investment in our eye care services to meet the challenge of preventing blindness in Europe,” said Narinder Sharma, Chief Executive Officer, AMD Alliance International.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) recognise that the prevalence of eye diseases is increasing – with the global incidence set to double between 1990 and 2020 – and have established their global public health initiative, *Vision 2020: The Right to Sight*, to encourage and promote the development of national eye care plans. However, to date, only three European nations have adopted the Vision

2020 strategies and vision health remains neglected at the European policy level. The WHO has previously stated that 80% of blindness globally is preventable.¹

“We have joined this forum to raise awareness and drive action to safe guard the sight of Europeans and to promote greater attention to eye health, as no European should go blind if it can be avoided. WHO’s Vision 2020 states that this is a global health priority, and we need to ensure that this also becomes a health priority in Europe,” said Professor Ian Banks, President, European Men’s Health Forum (EMHF).

European Forum Against Blindness (E-FAB)

To build on the WHO Vision 2020 Strategy, E-FAB, a recent alliance of advocacy groups, planned a Parliamentary Roundtable on the occasion of World Sight Day, to discuss with policymakers, healthcare professionals and key stakeholders the results of this survey and highlight the importance of making preventable blindness a public health priority. The evening debate will provide a forum for exchange and education, and the group hopes to reach consensus on potential policy avenues to better ensure retina diseases - such as those caused by diabetes, for example - are diagnosed, to ensure timely intervention and prevent blindness. Based on the outcome of the event discussions, E-FAB will develop a Call to Action with the hope of building a solid and sustainable coalition.

E-FAB is an independent, multi-stakeholder advocacy platform, and is currently partnered with the AMD Alliance International, the European Council of Optometry and Optics, the European Men’s Health Forum and the International Diabetes Federation European Region (IDF Europe). The group aims to act as a platform to bring together key third parties (patient groups, healthcare professionals, policymakers and advocacy groups) across Europe, to jointly and collectively increase awareness of and attention to retina diseases, and ultimately prevent vision loss through more timely diagnosis and intervention.

E-FAB is supported by Novartis and Alcon as a service to medicine and patients.

World Sight Day

World Sight Day is an annual day of awareness to focus global attention on blindness, visual impairment and rehabilitation of the visually impaired, and is held on the second Thursday in October. It was first celebrated in 1998 and subsequently integrated into the joint WHO-IAPB VISION 2020 initiative. Typical activities include taking part in awareness-raising walks or distributing and displaying posters, bookmarks, booklets and other forms of information to raise awareness about preventable blindness. This year World Sight Day is on 11 October.

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References

1. The WHO Vision 2020: The Right to Sight http://www.who.int/blindness/ACTION_PLAN_WHA62-1-English.pdf