



EUROPEAN COALITION FOR VISION  
*Better Eye Health For Europe*

European Coalition for Vision  
199 Gloucester Terrace  
London  
W2 6LD  
United Kingdom  
[44] 20 7298 5151  
<http://www.ecvision.eu/>

1 January 2020

### **HAPPY 2020 - YEAR OF VISION!**

Happy New Year 2020 and many congratulations on being a member of the European Parliament for the next five years. This is a crucially important time for European democratic systems, economies and social values and we wish you every success in strengthening and improving them.

Our reason for writing to you at the start of 2020 is that this will be a totemic year for vision, eye health and equality matters for the 40 million blind and partially sighted citizens across Europe, including 309,000 children and younger adults.

### **VISION 2020 Goals**

Twenty years ago, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and, in our case, the 53 countries of the WHO European Region, with the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), set the crucially important VISION 2020 challenge. This was to achieve the elimination of avoidable blindness by 2020. In Europe and the EU most member states signed up to the initiative and there have been some successes

- we have made progress with equal treatment and adaptations for blind and partially sighted people in our communities
- information and digital technologies have brought huge changes to the way we live and made the modern world more inclusive for blind and partially sighted people
- transport systems, crossing signals and pavement markings have improved mobility and inclusion for blind and partially sighted people
- the pharmaceutical industry has developed new treatments for eye diseases such as wet macular disease which 20 years ago inevitably meant vision loss and blindness
- there has been some success in improving access to comprehensive eye health services in Europe and the First World.

In October 2019, the WHO launched its long-awaited [World Report on Vision](#), which forecasts a surge in the need for eye care in the next few years, highlights the importance of raising public awareness about healthy eyes and vision and identifies the challenges that still exist around preventable sight loss:

- eye conditions are projected to increase due to a variety of factors, including ageing population, lifestyle and noncommunicable, chronic diseases
- eye care services are poorly integrated into health systems
- age-related macular degeneration has the highest prevalence in Caucasian populations in Europe (57.4% of people between the age of 45 and 85 suffer from any age-related macular degeneration).

Key contributory factors to these challenges are the lack of priority given to eye health by European governments, nations and health systems. According to the latest [State of Health in the EU](#) report, only 3% of spending is devoted to prevention across the EU, which is also noticeable in the eye health sector.

Eye diseases and vision loss are particularly linked with older age and, as we successfully increase longevity, so we increase the risk of visual and sensory impairment. This in turn impacts on wider health, well-being, staying in work and independence. It also contributes to loneliness, falls, depression and cognitive impairment in older age. Added to this is a growing incidence of myopia amongst young people almost certainly associated with 21<sup>st</sup> Century lifestyle changes.

The impact of uncorrected vision loss is significant and proven on education, employment, and on road safety.

### **What can be done?**

The key interventions which can prevent this are

- access to regular eye examinations by a qualified health professional (an eye examination is not just about vision but about the health of the internal structures and back of the eye which is where most eye disease and impairment start)
- early identification of eye disease and timely intervention
- access to effective treatments such as surgery and medical interventions, glasses and rehabilitation services for all people who need it, ensuring access to the poorest and most marginalised without suffering financial hardship
- Prioritising eye health within strategies and regulations on health, education, employment and road safety.

### **What is the European Coalition for Vision (ECV) doing?**

The ECV is a voluntary not-for-profit alliance of professional bodies, patient groups, European NGOs, disabled people's organisations, trade associations representing suppliers, academic and research groups. We exist to raise the profile of eye health and vision; help prevent avoidable visual impairment; and secure an equal and inclusive society for those with irreversible blindness or low vision in Europe.

Over the course of this year, we shall be publicising three seminal reports

- a **Eurovision project** report (supported by the European Commission) on the self-reported vision problems of EU citizens in the context of demographic, socio-economic, other health determinant and access factors

- two reports on the prevalence and scale of vision loss prepared by the **international Vision Loss Expert Group (VLEG)** which produces the principal estimates for vision loss which underpin the IAPB Vision Atlas.

### **How you can help**

We will alert you to these publications as they occur. We would appreciate it if you could help give these publicity both within the European Parliament and in your home countries where people fighting to preserve sight and improve eye health and access to treatment, need your moral support.

Each of these publications will provide data by individual countries and in Europe as a whole, thereby allowing benchmarking within the WHO European Region and between the region and other regions of the World.

A key date is **World Sight Day 8 October 2020**, which is an opportunity to help us raise the profile of eye health in every country, Parliament and news media in Europe on that day by re-tweeting or 'liking' our Twitter messages.

Thank you in advance for your help in this pivotal year for eye health in Europe. Together we can make every one of the next 20 years count in bringing eye health to all, reducing avoidable blindness across the nations of Europe and enabling those living with visual impairment to participate in and contribute fully to our modern European society.

If you would like further information or just to let us know you support eye health for all, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

In the meantime, all members of the Coalition and I wish you a very happy and clear-sighted 2020!

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D'.

**David Hewlett**  
**President of the European Coalition for Vision**