

World Sight Day

8 October 2009



gender & eye health

equal access to care



photo credit:
Lisa Hamm

Twice as many women are blind

The theme of World Sight Day 2009 (WSD09) is **Gender & Eye Health – equal access to care**, recognising that two-thirds of blind people worldwide are women and girls, and that in many places men have twice the access to eye care. The day of awareness is set to be marked by up to 300 events in over 50 countries.

London, UK, 8th October 2009: The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) has published a report to mark World Sight Day, which examines the current situation, and highlights effective strategies which are successfully addressing gender inequity in eye health, particularly in developing countries.

IAPB is the partner of the World Health Organization (WHO) in the <www.VISION2020.org>VISION 2020: The Right to Sight global initiative for the elimination of avoidable blindness. Its member organisations include virtually all international eye care NGOs worldwide, whose projects and programmes make up the report's content.

The report cites compelling evidence that in most developing countries, women are less likely to receive eye care services than men, and that additionally, women comprise more than half of the elderly population, and the natural incidence of some blinding diseases (cataract and trachoma) is higher among women than men, which results in a situation where women account for nearly two-thirds of blind people worldwide.

According to the British Journal of Ophthalmology, "blindness and severe visual impairment from cataract could be reduced by around 11% in low- and middle-income countries if women were to receive cataract surgery at the same rate as men." The strategies described in the report are simple, achievable and it is hoped they will contribute significantly to reducing blindness in developing countries.

According to the report, which includes case studies, programme reports and statistics from around the world, "the systematic approach to 'gender and blindness' can serve as a model to help other health areas to address gender inequity."

Activities and events are planned around the world, including Washington, USA, Sydney, Australia, Prague, Czech Republic, Tehran, Iran, Delhi, India and Port Au Prince in Trinidad & Tobago. The event in Washington will be the first of its kind, as a coalition of USA-based non-profits collaborate in the name of the global initiative.

On 8th October, plant a tree to commemorate WSD09! OR:

**Send us a photograph of 2 people of different genders – one of whom is blindfolded.
We hope to create an international photo montage!**

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About World Sight Day

World Sight Day (WSD) is an international day of awareness, held annually on the second Thursday of October to focus attention on the global issue of avoidable blindness and visual impairment.

Included on the official World Health Organization calendar, WSD is co-ordinated by IAPB under the VISION 2020 Global Initiative. The theme, and certain core materials are generated by IAPB.

All events are organised independently by IAPB members and supporting organisations.

Global Key Messages for WSD09

- **Nearly two-thirds of blind people worldwide are women & girls**
- **In many places, men have twice the access to eye care as women**
- **Equal access to eye care could substantially reduce blindness in poor countries***
- **Simple and effective strategies can and do successfully address this inequity within VISION 2020: The Right to Sight**
- **80% of blindness is avoidable – i.e. could be prevented, cured or treated**
- 45million people worldwide are blind, and 269million are vision impaired
- 90% of blind people live in low-income countries
- The world's leading cause of blindness is cataract – yet it is curable by a simple, cost-effective operation

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Images, case studies & interviews with senior IAPB representatives available on request

www.v2020.org/wsd09

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