Healthy Eyes Healthy People Fact Sheet

The American Optometric Association (AOA) took a leading position in improving the eye and visual health of the nation through its Healthy Eyes Healthy People® (HEHP) initiative. Established in 2002, HEHP promotes partnerships between optometrists, government agencies and health care advocates to expand ground-breaking approaches for community outreach in order to promote good eye health and optimal vision.

In 2004, the HEHP initiative was expanded to include a community-based outreach approach by awarding HEHP State Association Grants. The HEHP grants are based on the vision objectives contained within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service’s Healthy People program, designed to improve the health of Americans. Vision objectives were included for the first time in the Healthy People 2010 goals. Healthy People 2020 also include vision objectives. The eight vision objectives of the HEHP program include: Increase the proportion of children age 5 years and under who have visited (had an eye examination by) an eye care provider in the preceding 12 months; Reduce visual impairment in children and adolescents; Reduce occupational eye injuries; Increase the proportion of adults who have a comprehensive eye examination, including dilation, within the past 2 years; Reduce visual impairment; Increase the use of personal protective eyewear in recreational activities and hazardous situations around the home; Increase vision rehabilitation; Increase the proportion of Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) that provide comprehensive vision health services.

The Healthy Eyes Healthy People® Community Grant Program is intended to stimulate community initiatives in health promotion and disease prevention that support the vision objectives of Healthy People 2020 by providing “seed money” to begin or continue vision-related projects. Applicants must propose a project that focuses on a Healthy People 2020 vision objective.

Since its inception, the AOA and Optometry Cares® have distributed $1,152,000 in grants to state optometric associations. Nearly 300 grants have funded collaborative community outreach projects, including projects in diabetes, glaucoma, children’s vision, eye safety and low vision. These project grants have been funded by Luxottica and VSP.

Each award is worth up to a maximum of $5,000. Any optometrist may apply through their state optometric association, which must officially submit the application. Letters of support for collaboration from each participating organization are required with each application form. Collaborations with other state health associations and/or public agencies must reflect broad-based sponsorship. The Optometry Cares® Community Grants Committee evaluates, selects and administers the projects.
The HEHP grants are a tool for optometrists to change community health programs so that vision services are recognized as vital to the health care system and to improving the quality of life for all Americans. HEHP program has diverse audiences. HEHP recognizes, promotes and educate awareness of visual disorders, systemic and ocular diseases and public health policy that impacts the health of communities. HEHP reaches out to all 50 states and its mission is to reduce eye health disparities in the United States. Data has been compiled for the last eight years and the AOA analyzes the outcomes of each HEHP project.

About Optometry Cares® – The AOA Foundation:
Optometry Cares® - The AOA Foundation manages seven entities including InfantSEE®, VISION USA, Optometry’s Fund for Disaster Relief, Endowment Fund and The Archives and Museum of Optometry and the National Optometry Hall of Fame.

Optometry Cares’ mission is to expand eye health and vision care access to everyone in the United States in order to enhance human performance and quality of life. For more information, visit www.aoafoundation.org.

About the American Optometric Association:
The American Optometric Association represents approximately 33,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians. Optometrists serve patients in nearly 6,500 communities across the country, and in 3,500 of those communities are the only eye doctors.

American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors on the frontline of eye and vision care who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in a patient’s overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

Prior to optometry school, optometrists typically complete four years of undergraduate study, culminating in a bachelor’s degree. Required undergraduate coursework for pre-optometry students is extensive and covers a wide variety of advanced health, science and mathematics. Optometry school consists of four years of postgraduate, doctoral study concentrating on both the eye and systemic health. In addition to their formal training, doctors of optometry must undergo annual continuing education to stay current on the latest standards of care. For more information, visit www.aoa.org.