

**National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health
Maternal and Child Health Bureau**

Background

More than 12.1 million school-age children, or one in four, have some form of vision problem, yet the growing prevalence of these problems begins before a child even enters school. Eye conditions affect 5 to 10 percent of preschool-aged children and include refractive error (myopia, hyperopia and astigmatism), strabismus (eye misalignment), and vision deprivation (e.g. cataract, drooping eyelid), all of which may result in amblyopia (loss of or reduced vision in one eye). Untreated amblyopia will lead to permanent vision loss and is present in 1 to 4 percent of preschool-aged children. If not detected and treated early, vision impairment could affect all aspects of life, negatively impacting a child's ability to learn, athletic ability, and self-esteem. Good vision contributes to a strong foundation for school readiness and success in life.

These daunting problems significantly affect our nation's children, yet something can be done! Vision screening is an appropriate and effective public health intervention. The screening should use validated tools, be age and developmentally appropriate, include direct referrals to eye care for children with neurodevelopmental delay, and contain a strong follow-up component. Currently, requirements for preventive eye care/vision screenings prior to or during the school years vary broadly from state to state. Many states have no standards and those with standards present with little consistency regarding type, frequency, and referral or follow-up requirement protocol.¹ Inclusion of vision screenings with a comprehensive approach to follow up treatment and an integrated approach to data collection as a part of the required health component for grant recipients will help to change disparities in vision and eye health for our nation's children.

The National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health

The Maternal and Child Health Bureau serves a critical role in promoting vision health for children across the age continuum, and does so through the Center.

The Center, administered by Prevent Blindness, is designed to support the development of a coordinated public health infrastructure to promote and ensure a comprehensive, multi-tiered continuum of vision care and eye health for young children. The Center is committed to conducting this work through strong partnerships, sound science, and targeted policy initiatives.

The Center has established an Advisory Committee comprised of experts in ophthalmology, optometry, pediatrics, public health, childcare, academia, family advocacy, and others who have a stake in the field of children's vision. Members of the Advisory Committee are working to implement recommendations toward national guidelines for quality improvement strategies, vision screening and developing a continuum of children's vision and eye health that were developed by an independent panel of experts from 2009-2012.

The Center focuses its efforts on achieving the following three core objectives:

- Provide national leadership in dissemination of best practices, infrastructure development, professional education, and national vision screening guidelines that ensure a continuum of vision and eye health care for children;
- Advance state-based performance improvement systems, screening guidelines, and a mechanism for uniform data collection and reporting; and
- Provide technical assistance to states in the implementation of strategies for vision screening, establishing quality improvement measures, and improving mechanisms for surveillance.



¹ Naser N, Hartman EE. Comparison of state guidelines and policies for vision screening and eye exams: preschool through early childhood. Poster presented at Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology annual meeting. 2008.