



Celebrating Ten Years of Improvement in Children's Vision (2009-2019)

Approaches to children's vision health have historically been challenged by a fragmented public health system. A successful program will empower state-level action in addressing children's vision and engage community partners and professionals in addressing their respective responsibilities to support children's eye health. Several **essential elements** must be adopted to improve the quality and performance of practices and systems for children's vision: uniform planning, establishment of a surveillance system, coordination and collaboration among agencies and community partners, a comprehensive screening and referral infrastructure, a uniform approach to training, technical assistance resources, improved policies, and increased public and professional education and awareness.

Realizing that all stakeholders across the spectrum must be engaged in this challenge, Prevent Blindness established our *National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health* (the "NCCVEH") in 2009 to strengthen the nation's public health system for children's vision. All young children deserve an improved system to ensure that vision problems are identified early and treated in a timely manner, standards for screening and care are uniform across the country, and that appropriate surveillance and preventive interventions are in place. Over the past 10 years the NCCVEH has reshaped the system for children's vision health to ensure no child is unsuccessful in school or life as a result of an undiagnosed vision problem.

In order to improve the system, the NCCVEH has provided national leadership, education, training, and coordination 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. This approach leads to a uniform implementation of successful screening and referral programs, increased follow-up to care, improved surveillance, reduced vision health disparities, stakeholder engagement...and, ultimately, improved vision health for children. The NCCVEH is committed to conducting this work through strong partnerships, sound science, and targeted policy initiatives.

Over the course of the past ten years, the NCCVEH has laid the groundwork for an evidence-based strategy to children's vision and each of these accomplishments represent best-practices, offers templates and resources, and engages stakeholders to leverage a continued national movement to improve the vision of young children.

The strategic path to improvement for children's vision has impacted more than 5 million children by the work of the NCCVEH through improved access to eye care, uniformity in practice and policies, and increased education and awareness on the role of vision in a child's life.

JAVI'S STORY- THE POWER OF COLLABORATION TO SAVE SIGHT



Javier was a dream come true to his Mother and Father who thought they would never be blessed with a child- he was a "miracle baby"! When he was born, his doctors were concerned that Javier may have a vision problem. An eye exam soon after birth gave Javier a diagnosis of Cortical Vision Impairment (CVI), a condition that indicates that the visual systems of the brain do not consistently understand or interpret what the eyes see. Javier's parents were told that he was "completely visually unaware" and connected the family with an Early Intervention (EI) Specialist to learn how to address the needs of a young child who is blind.

A state-level coalition to improve the system for children's vision in Massachusetts, which included vision specialists, community partners, and the school for the blind, helped to make the Early Intervention Specialist aware of a special program going on to provide eye examinations to very young children. She encouraged Javi's parents to take him to see the eye doctors when they came to his town. At 12 months old, Javier had his second eye examination and happily a new diagnosis- high refractive error- was given. Javier was given a pair of high quality eyeglasses and for the first time in his life he saw the faces of his parents, and the world opened up to him!

"I'm thankful that we did everything we could to help Javi's vision. The first time he ever smiled at us was when he looked at us through his glasses."

-Jerisa, Javi's Mom

2009-2015 Expert-Led Guidance Documents

A national, multi-disciplinary panel of experts developed recommendations on improving the systems that address vision health for children, resulting in three peer-reviewed papers published in *Optometry and Vision Science* in January 2015. These recommendations align with three key areas for a comprehensive approach to children's vision health:

- Performance measures
- Uniform management and integration of patient level data
- Best practice protocol in vision screening for children ages 3 through 5.

State-Level Technical Assistance and National Resources

The Center works with states to develop comprehensive and sustainable vision and eye health programs, and serves as a catalyst to advancing public health systems of care around children's vision. The Center program and policy review, training, quality improvement and workshops, webinars and conferences. The NCCVEH has directly assisted groups in 29 states and presented in 39 states and at 17 national and international events..

NCCVEH produced "Children's Vision and Eye Health: A Snapshot of Current National Issues," an online tool kit for school nurses to implement a comprehensive system of vision health care for children, and an Children's Vision Screening Certification course.

2009-2015 State Pilot Projects

The Center tested concepts at the state level in Ohio, Massachusetts, Illinois, Georgia, and North Carolina. The pilot sites formed multi-disciplinary coalitions to study possible strategies for universal vision screening of children in their particular state. The results led to the development of best practices. The state pilots presented at state and national level conferences, delivered training and technical assistance for state department staff, created unified task forces and coalitions, and worked toward the establishment of uniform data systems and statewide Title V performance measures for vision screening.

Quality Improvement Project

In 2015 the NCCVEH in collaboration with the National Institute for Child Health Quality launched the **Improving Children's Vision- Systems, Stakeholders, and Support Quality Improvement (QI) Collaborative**, to improve the systems supporting children's vision and eye health. Three states participated: Ohio, Wisconsin and Wyoming. The project was successful in achieving its goals through state-level action;

All state teams built new and/or strengthened existing partnerships and the ICV project provided evidence of the need for data coordination and started the conversation among key stakeholders.

Community Of Practice

The NCCVEH is launching the Better Vision Together Community of Practice, a learning and sharing opportunity to improve vision and eye health in children ages 5 years old and younger in up to ten states. This Community of Practice will allow the teams to engage with their peers via regular communication, seek advice from experts, share resources and best practices, and identify solutions to shared issues that may include needed policy changes, evidence-based vision screening, improving access to eye care, parent/caregiver engagement, public awareness and education, and collection of vision data.

Detail on each of these approaches can be found at: <http://nationalcenter.preventblindness.org/>

What the Future Holds

While the past decade is marked by numerous indicators of success for the NCCVEH, there remain too many children who are allowed to enter a classroom without the benefit of healthy eyes and good sight. With our evidence, curated best practices, expert guidance, and the resources to improve practices, the NCCVEH will continue to educate parents and caregivers and collaborate with professionals and key state and federal agencies to build partnerships that enable states to improve their children's vision health system of care. We will do this by:

- **Promoting peer-to-peer learning through the *Better Vision Together* Community of Practice**
- **Developing new resources and providing technical assistance and education for professionals:** Tool Kits, revised reports, webinars, and conference presentations
- **Advocating for national performance measures, health objectives, and improved surveillance systems**
- **Advocating for a national-level children's vision program** housed within the HRSA-Maternal and Child Health Bureau
- **Empowering parents and caregivers:** through education, public awareness campaigns and parent-focused tool kits

"Many individuals, public health agencies, and other stakeholders around the country have been working tirelessly on programs and policies to ensure that all children have the opportunity to develop his/her optimal visual potential. Twelve years ago, Jeff Todd (now Prevent Blindness CEO) and several others advocated to HRSA about the importance of children's vision. Bonnie Strickland, Director of the Division of Services for Children with Special Health Needs at the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, listened intently to the evidence and became an amazing ambassador-- helping Prevent Blindness create what has become an amazing center, the National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health, modeled after successes in newborn hearing screening. The National Center brought optometry, ophthalmology, vision scientists, public health and government together and found consensus where sometimes there had been none, relying closely on the available scientific literature." -Drs. Sandra Block and Jean Ramsey, Co-Chairs, NCCVEH Advisory Committee