

Eye on Health

Don't Let Cost Be The Reason You Go Blind

(NAPSA)—Why would someone see an eye doctor when they have no symptoms? The truth is, some of the diseases that can rob you of your sight don't show symptoms until you've already lost vision.

The good news is that an eye exam by an ophthalmologist—a physician who specialize in medical and surgical eye care—can catch the early signs of disease before you lose vision.

To help seniors who haven't seen an ophthalmologist in three or more years, the American Academy of Ophthalmology's EyeCare America® program may be able to help.

"As an ophthalmologist, I grew tired of seeing so many older patients too late to stop the progression of vision loss," said Thomas Hutchinson, MD, founder of EyeCare America. "This is why the American Academy of Ophthalmology's EyeCare America program exists—to catch eye disease and provide access to eye care to older Americans in need."

EyeCare America has helped more than 1.8 million people since it started in 1985. The program has been credited with saving not just vision, but lives.

Michael R. Feilmeier MD, an ophthalmologist and EyeCare America volunteer, likely saved an elderly man's life when he came to him with complaints of partial vision loss. Following a comprehensive eye examination, Dr. Feilmeier detected troubling signs of a blood clot and immediately sent him to a specialist for an ultrasound, which revealed a large clot obstructing 95 percent of the patient's left carotid artery.

"Had this condition not been quickly diagnosed and treated, the patient could have certainly had a major stroke," said Feilmeier.

Many diseases, from high blood pressure to some cancers, can be diagnosed early through a medical eye exam. Because the eye is an important part of our nervous system, abnormalities can be detected in the fine blood vessels at



Certain older Americans can get low- or no-cost eye exams.

the back of the eye before they are seen in other parts of the body.

If you are concerned about the cost of a medical eye exam, EyeCare America may be able to help.

To be eligible for the Seniors program, you:

- Are a U.S. citizen or legal resident
- Are age 65 or older
- Do not belong to an HMO or have eye care benefits through the VA
- Have not seen an ophthalmologist in three or more years.

If you are not eligible for the Seniors program you may become eligible for the Glaucoma program, which provides a glaucoma eye exam at no cost to those who are uninsured.

To be eligible for the Glaucoma program, you:

- Are a U.S. citizen or legal resident
- Do not belong to an HMO or have eye care benefits through the VA
- Have not had an eye exam in 12 months or more
- Are at increased risk for glaucoma, determined by your age, race and family history of glaucoma.

More than 90 percent of care is provided, often at no out-of-pocket cost to patients. Visit www.aao.org/eyecareamerica to see if you or someone you know qualifies to meet with an ophthalmologist, an EyeCare America volunteer.

EyeCare America is co-sponsored by the Knights Templar Eye Foundation, Inc., with additional support provided by Alcon.