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EARLY DETECTION AND TREATMENT PROTECT VISION FROM GLAUCOMA

Wisconsin optometrists stress annual comprehensive eye exams to preserve sight.

MADISON, Wis. – Glaucoma affects more than 4.2 million people in the United States, and nearly half of those individuals are unaware they have the disease. This lack of awareness is especially concerning because glaucoma often develops without noticeable symptoms until permanent vision loss has already occurred. According to the American Optometric Association, glaucoma is one of the leading causes of blindness in the U.S., underscoring the need for greater public awareness and routine eye care.

Often referred to as the “sneak thief of sight,” glaucoma can quietly damage vision over time. “By the time symptoms appear, irreversible vision loss may have already taken place,” said Dr. Ryan Deibert, 2026 Wisconsin Optometric Association President and New Berlin optometrist. “That’s why routine, comprehensive eye exams are so important. Early diagnosis gives us the best chance to protect a patient’s vision.”

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that damage the optic nerve, most commonly due to increased pressure inside the eye. The most common form, primary open-angle glaucoma, develops slowly and typically without warning signs. As optic nerve fibers are lost, patients may experience gradual and permanent vision loss. While glaucoma has no cure, early diagnosis and consistent treatment can be highly effective. In fact, when detected and managed early, only about five percent of glaucoma patients in developed countries progress to legal blindness.

Despite this, detection gaps remain. Only 43 percent of adults report having dilated eye exams, which is the most effective method for identifying glaucoma before vision loss occurs. “Many people assume they would notice symptoms if something were wrong,” Dr. Deibert added. “Unfortunately, that’s not how glaucoma works. A comprehensive, dilated exam is critical, even when vision seems fine.”

Another common misconception is that glaucoma only affects older adults. While risk increases with age, the disease can develop at any stage of life and is often first detected in people in their 40s. Individuals at higher risk include those with a family history of glaucoma, adults over age 60, African Americans, and people with certain medical conditions.

Treatment options for glaucoma may include prescription eye drops, oral medications, or surgical intervention to reduce eye pressure. Diagnosis is the essential first step, and the only reliable way to detect glaucoma is through a comprehensive eye exam performed by a licensed eye doctor.

The Wisconsin Optometric Association recommends annual comprehensive eye exams for adults and children. To find a licensed optometrist in your community, visit www.woa-eyes.org/members.

Statistics cited are based on data from the Glaucoma Research Foundation and the American Optometric Association.

Wisconsin optometrists are available for media interviews to discuss glaucoma risk factors, early warning signs, and how early detection can preserve vision.

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About the Wisconsin Optometric Association

The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 640 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA’s website at www.woa-eyes.org.