

Transcript Details

This is a transcript of an educational program. Details about the program and additional media formats for the program are accessible by visiting: <https://reachmd.com/national-eye-institute/nei-blindness-prevention-initiative/a-call-to-action-from-regina-benjamin-md-the-18th-us-surgeon-general/10907/>

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A Call to Action from Regina Benjamin, MD, the 18th U.S. Surgeon General

Did you know, that nearly 30% of individuals with diabetes, and 40% of those living with diabetic retinopathy or diabetic macular edema are not receiving routine exams?

Hello, I am Dr. Regina Benjamin, former United States Surgeon General. I am a long-time champion of the power of prevention. Prevention is the foundation of Public Health, and it was the foundation of my work as Surgeon General. I am proud to have released the first ever National Prevention Strategy, a road map to healthy and fit nation. The NPS was our attempt to begin to move our nation from a focus on sickness and disease to one based on wellness and prevention.

While I have left the position, I have not left the mission. From my current role as a rural family physician in Bayou La Batre, Alabama, to the corporate board rooms where I sit, I continue to stress the importance of prevention, particularly as it pertains to health disparities and underserved populations. One of those areas is diabetes and the eye-health consequences that is associated with it. Unfortunately, the statistics surrounding eye diseases are staggering, and these numbers are even worse for African Americans and Hispanics. More than 30 million Americans are living with diabetes putting them at risk for vision loss and blindness. Nearly 8 million people are living with diabetic retinopathy and we expect that number to double by the year 2050. In fact, diabetic retinopathy is one of the leading causes of blindness among adults. Many Americans are living with diabetic macular edema, which can also lead to substantial vision loss if left untreated.

Many of our patients are not even aware that diabetes can affect their eyes. In a recent study of 700 adults with diabetes, only 15% of those with unaffected vision realized they were at risk for future vision loss and possible blindness. Sadly, nearly half of all patients with diabetic retinopathy do not connect their vision problems with their diabetes and almost a quarter of them have not undergone a dilated eye exam in the past year, even though The American Academy of Ophthalmology, the American Optometric Association, and the American Diabetes Association all recommend annual dilated retinal eye exams.

We are failing these patients. We need your help. If you are a clinician who manages patients with diabetes—an endocrinologist, a family physician, an internist, or a nurse practitioner, physician assistant, diabetes educator, nurse, or many others—I want to remind you of the important role you play in the overall eye-health of these patients.

You may very well be the one person that can save them from a future of decreased vision or possible blindness. Vigilance – for Prevention. If you are an eye-health professional – ophthalmologists, optometrists, retinal specialists, etc. – We ask that you stay up to date on the fast-growing advances in diabetic retinopathy and diabetic macular edema management to ensure the best possible vision outcomes. I invite you to join us in a comprehensive continuing medical education curriculum sponsored by the National Eye Institute. This blindness prevention initiative is called “*Saving Sight, Preventing Vision Loss: The Critical Role of Early Diagnosis, Referral, and Treatment in Diabetic Retinopathy and Diabetic Macular Edema*” a mouth full, but it sums it up. The online curriculum is designed for all levels of clinicians with specific components for primary care, endocrinology, and optometry and of course ophthalmology. Specialty-specific CME-credit is available.

As your former Surgeon General and on behalf of the millions of Americans living with, or at risk for diabetes—I invite you to participate in this initiative. Together, we can reduce visual impairment due to diabetic retinopathy.