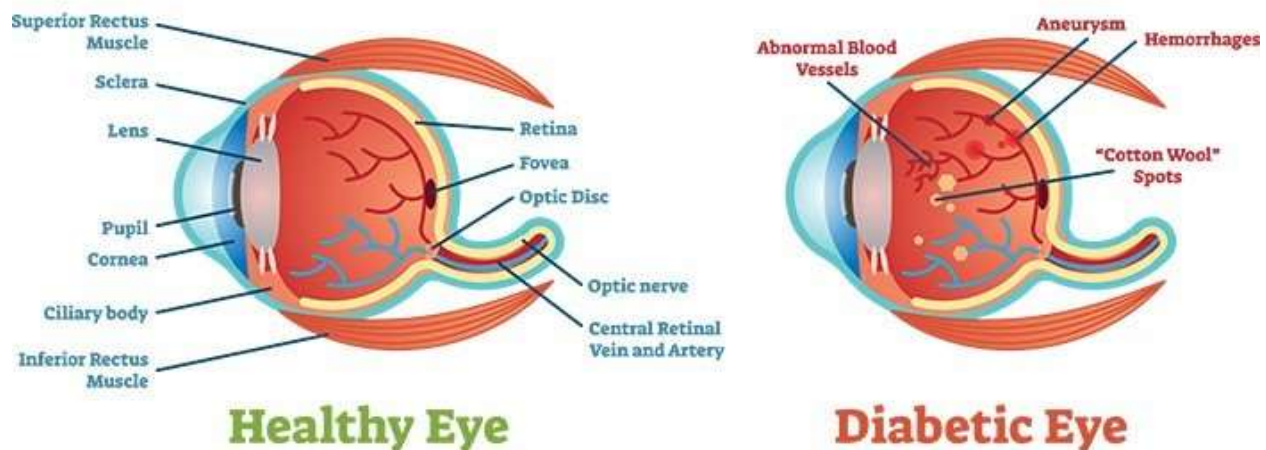


Fight the leading cause of working age blindness ... diabetes

By: Doug Earle, President & CEO, Fighting Blindness Canada (November 30, 2021)

Diabetic Retinopathy



In Canada, someone is diagnosed with diabetes every three minutes.

A diabetes diagnosis holds many implications for a person: it impacts a person's blood sugar levels, their diet, and their daily activities.

But did you also know it can affect their ability to see?

1 million Canadians are living with diabetic retinopathy. They are at significant risk of blindness if disease progression to diabetic macular edema (bleeding in the eye). In fact, Dr. Michael Brent advised 20 years after diagnosis, 100% of Type I and over 80% of Type II have developed diabetic retinopathy.

Diabetes does not have to lead to blindness. Vision research has delivered treatments that in **3 out of 4 of the cases vision can be stabilized**, and in some cases, repair the damage, but only if they are diagnosed early.

It is critical to avoid blindness that people living with diabetes receive an annual eye exam. However, research undertaken by Fighting Blindness Canada's Clinician-Scientist Emerging Leaders Dr. Felfeli, Dr Ballios and their colleagues found only 60% of Ontarians with diabetes are receiving a annual eye examination.

This lack of a regular eye is a serious threat to their vision.

November is Diabetes Awareness Month. Fighting Blindness Canada did their part in raising awareness and sharing resources about diabetes and the risk of diabetic retinopathy and losing your sight.

First, COVID-19 is impacting eye health for people living with diabetes. In a study released in October, there were:

- 10,470 fewer anti-VEGF eye injection claims for diabetic macular edema in 2020 compared to 2019.

As a result of the almost 3 million fewer optometry visits, the report found:

- 11,575 missed referrals for diabetic retinopathy – some of which would have required urgent care.

The report found an additional 199 people likely developed vision loss from diabetic retinopathy due to missed referrals during the pandemic in 2020.

There was an increase in the proportion of referrals later in 2020 which were urgent after services resumed.

It speaks to an urgent need for a National Vision Health Plan to stop the crisis of preventable blindness. Please sign our petition for this plan at www.StopVisionLoss.ca.

The cost of vision loss and blindness in Canada: The impact of COVID-19 was released in October by Fighting Blindness Canada and our partners Canadian Council of the Blind, Canadian Association of Optometrists and Canadian Ophthalmological Society.

Second, Fighting Blindness Canada is a supporter of Diabetes Action Canada (DAC). DAC is a pan-Canadian research organization that was launched in 2016. Funded jointly by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research's (CIHR) Strategic Patient-Oriented Research (SPOR) program, non-profit organizations, and private sponsors.

DAC is researching a national diabetic retinopathy screening program aimed at preventing diabetes-related vision loss. This program hopes to help address the barriers that many Canadians with diabetes face in receiving regular eye exams.

Thanks to **TD Bank** support of Fighting Blindness, 3 Community Health Centres in Toronto are working with "Project Open". The research project is data mining OHIP billing data to identify individuals with diabetes that have not received an eye exam

and through each Centre's diabetes clinics, be invited to receive this examination. The goal is to prevent blindness. With this project, we hope to develop the model so it can be rolled out across the country.

And more good news, CIHR has granted funding in November to expand the screening research beyond Ontario to Alberta, British Columbia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Third, on www.FightingBlindness.ca is extensive disease information about diabetic retinopathy. There is a way to share your story about your vision loss journey.

Let's work to change Diabetes being the leading cause of blindness in working age Canadians.