

The Value of Vision

The case for investing in eye health



A report by



Available on the





Why eye health matters

Almost everyone will be affected by an eye health or sight issue in their life. It is one of the truly universal issues, yet it is often overlooked or deprioritised.

The consequences are far-reaching – unemployment, poor academic performance, mental ill health, social isolation, and increased risk of injury and illness.

Globally there are over **2 billion people** living with a vision impairment. Shockingly, **over 1 billion of these people live daily with sight loss that could have been avoided or could still be treated.** And as the world's population grows and ages, lifestyles continue to be more sedentary with less time spent outdoors, and there is further reliance on screens by younger generations, the crisis is only set to worsen.

The good news is that we already have the solutions to tackle this global challenge. The interventions already exist and are proven, affordable, and easy-to-deliver. And crucially, the economic and societal impact of investing in them is profound.

Our new research, co-led with Seva Foundation and The Fred Hollows Foundation, shows that if action was taken to reach the 1 billion people living with avoidable sight loss, the boost to the world economy would be **\$447 billion annually**. It would result in 22 million more people employed and the equivalent of 13 million more years of learning in schools every year.

Investment in key policy areas and targeted interventions would unlock potential across every age group in every country. From classrooms to workplaces, the benefits would touch everyone.

And if, by 2030, every country across the world prioritised eye health and invested in simple solutions to protect its populations' vision, the worldwide benefits and increase in global productivity would be staggering.



Unlocking potential

Good vision is foundational to economic and societal participation. It results in healthier workforces and higher productivity at work, better attendance and educational outcomes at schools, greater participation in society, less injuries and less dependence on the wider health and welfare system.

If we reached the 1 billion people living with avoidable sight loss, every year there would be:

\$447 billion

boost to the world economy

22 million

more people employed

13 million

equivalent school years gained

1.2 million

**fewer injuries from crashes
on roads**

320,000

extra years of life lived

304 million

**people, predominantly
women, relieved of the
caregiving burden and
able to work more**

12.2 million

**fewer people living with
depression**

Our latest research

The burden of eye health already costs the global economy billions every year. But for the first time, our new research shows the huge economic return that is possible with targeted investment.

A powerful return on investment

Given that eye health provision in low- and middle-income countries lags behind higher income countries, and the majority of people living without access to adequate eye care services live in these countries, we have focussed on the economic and productivity benefits for 111 countries across Africa, Western Pacific, Asia, Eastern Mediterranean, Europe and the Americas.

Our research show that **every \$1 invested in eye health can yield a \$28 return** in low- and middle-income countries. That means that a **\$7.1 billion investment** in just six priority areas – including expanded community screenings, access to reading and prescription glasses, and more frequent eye exams – could unlock a **\$199 billion boost** in productivity in those countries over 5 years.

\$1 : \$28

every \$1 invested in eye health can yield a \$28 return in low- and middle-income countries

If further investment and policy changes were implemented and the 1 billion living with avoidable sight loss were reached, this would be increased to a \$447 billion boost to the world economy annually.

Methodology

The research looks at the benefits that would result from reaching 255 million people experiencing sight loss in the low- and middle-income countries. The same model was then used to extrapolate the bigger impact of reaching the 1 billion people globally who are currently living with avoidable sight loss.

We used globally modelled data on vision impairment prevalence, Gross National Income, economic growth rates, labour force participation, school enrolment and population structures.

We determined costs from data provided by 55 services providers across 25 countries, in the largest ever costing exercise in eye care in low- and middle-income countries. The data also segments each country's population across 5-year age ranges, recognising the different benefits of improved vision vary across the life cycle. The model timeline begins with a baseline year of 2025, projecting the impacts of scaled interventions over a five-year implementation period (2026-2030).



“Avoidable vision loss costs the global economy more than a trillion dollars every year in lost productivity. Investing in affordable eye care is one of the highest-returning investments for sustained economic growth”

Brad Wong
Chief Economist Seva Foundation
and President, Mettalytics

Time for action

The global burden associated with avoidable sight loss and poor eye health will only continue to grow and worsen without action.

Through the 2021 United Nation General Assembly's Resolution on Vision, as well as other political declarations and commitments over the last decade, leaders have already committed to improving access to quality eye health services, recognising it as a critical economic and development issue and integral to achieving Universal Health Coverage.

A truly global issue

While the majority of people living without adequate eye health services live in low-and middle-income countries, vision impairment has a disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations in every single country in the world, including high income countries.

Women, rural populations, older people, those with low incomes or disabilities, indigenous people and ethnic minority groups are the most likely to experience sight loss and the wider economic and social implications of it.

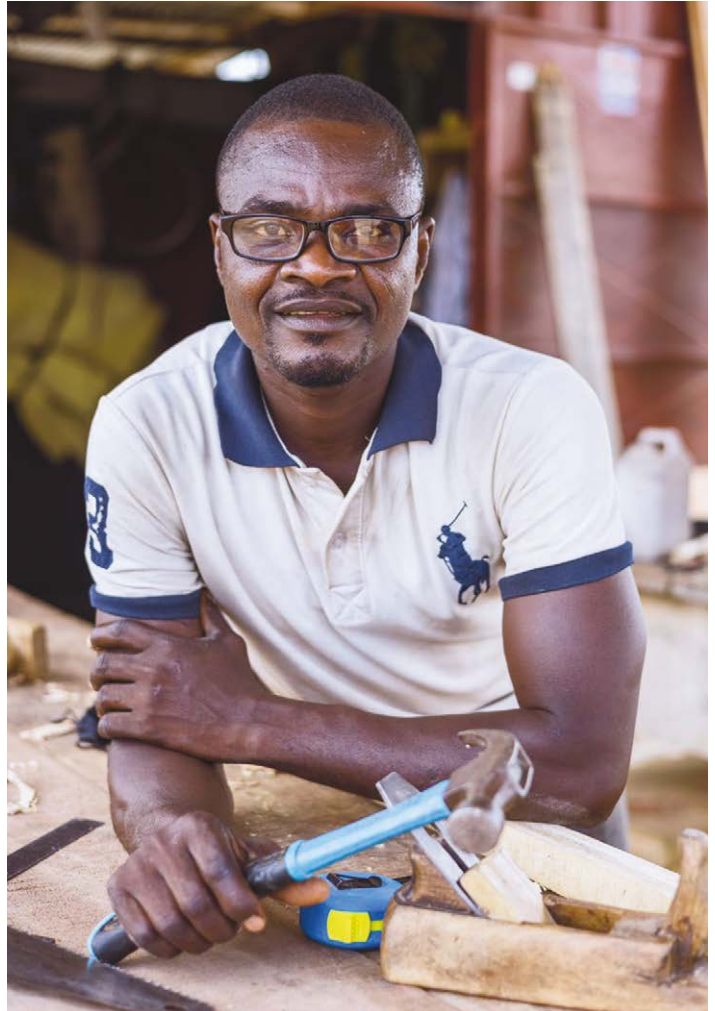
Policy framework

All countries need to implement national approaches that are fitting for their populations' needs. Prioritising the integration of eye health into broader health and social systems like education and workplaces is critical, as is committing to monitoring targets, sustainable financing models, strengthening the workforce, fostering public-private partnerships and creating the right regulatory environment.

Our Policy Framework outlines steps that different departments or ministries within governments can take to make an impact and to support their own national priorities.

“Eye health is an engine of productivity and shared prosperity. It unlocks human potential – every child who can see and every worker with clear vision is a worker with full potential”

H.E. Dr. Walton Webson
Permanent Representative of the
Mission of Antigua and Barbuda;
Founder/Co-chair of the UN Friends
of Vision Group



Six Accelerators

Our latest research has identified 6 key accelerator interventions which can supercharge the fight against vision loss and deliver huge productivity benefits back to countries by 2030.



Early detection through screenings in the community

Integrate simple vision and eye screenings into existing community infrastructure and processes, with an emphasis on school children, professional drivers and adults over 40 years old.

= More people checked, early and often



Give out reading glasses on the spot

Empower these same community screeners to hand out ready-made reading glasses if needed, right after the screening. They can be fitted and dispensed by people with minimal training and no medical experience.

= One visit, instant results



Increase capacity in the workforce

Increase the capacity in the existing workforce to carry out eye exams and dispense glasses. As well as training more optometrists, there should be an emphasis on training up existing mid-level eye care professionals, deploying mobile units and using tele-refraction technology.

= Better access, more eye exams and more prescription glasses worn



Boost surgical productivity and teams

Streamline and strengthen existing cataract surgery workflows, the division of tasks between surgeons and allied health workers, and the provision of optimal equipment. This has the potential to increase surgical productivity by 40-50%.

= Better-supported teams, more sight-restoring surgeries



Remove barriers to access

Reduce the blockers, like cost, distance and stigma, that are currently stopping people from accessing the care they need. Subsidies for procedures, support with travel to facilities, and information campaigns significantly increases usage and surgical output.

= Reduced barriers, increased uptake



Make cataract surgery even better

Ensure cataract operations are delivering the same high-quality vision for everyone, everywhere. Innovative training techniques, wider use of biometry and stronger minimum post-op care standards can all lead to better vision and fewer complications.

= More effective cataract surgery, more life-changing results

“Ending avoidable sight loss is not about charity – it is about releasing the potential and value of the global population to achieve individual dreams while empowering them to contribute to the economic growth and development of our world”

Dr. Caroline Casey
President, IAPB



What leaders need to do

Act

- Commit to leadership and action from the highest levels of Government.
- Activate nationally owned plans to deliver change and an integrated approach.
- Implement policy changes to address vision and eye health, recognising it as a whole-of-life issue that needs a holistic, whole-of-government approach.

Allocate

- Increase resources, recognising the return of investment that is possible both nationally and internationally.
- Explore innovative funding mechanisms and new ways to fund eye health.
- Foster partnerships with the private sector.

Accelerate

- Collaborate across the public and private sector and wider society to harness the educational and societal benefits of addressing poor vision.
- Implement the 6 accelerator interventions quickly and as a minimum and scale these up as progress is made.
- Harness technology and fast-track research and development in this area.

Find out more

The Value of Vision: The case for investing in eye health is available online. We also provide detailed data and visualizations at both the global and country levels, which can be explored on the IAPB Vision Atlas: <https://visionatlas.iapb.org/> offering comprehensive insights to support evidence-based investment in eye health.



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Photo credits

Assam tea pickers; by Sarah Day Photography

The eyes of a tailor; submitted by Duy Nguyen

I love my new glasses; by Keith Kalu, Lighthouse For Christ Eye Centre

Sew wonderful to see!; submitted by Ellen Karns, OneSight

From darkness to light; Collins Agyei Agyapong; submitted by Christiana Botic, VisionSpring

Getting her first glasses; by Elijah Eyo; submitted by Doris Esslet, Nathels' Optical Services

Cataract Post op; submitted by Health education at King Khaled eye specialist hospital

Elderly Woman Awaits Cataract Surgery; by Michael Amendolia; submitted by Madi Apthorpe, Tej Kohli Ruit Foundation

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