

Americans rate losing eyesight as having greatest impact on their lives

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Many Americans across racial and ethnic groups describe losing eyesight as potentially having the greatest impact on their day-to-day life, more so than other conditions including: loss of limb, memory, hearing and speech (57% of African-Americans, 49% of non-Hispanic whites, 43% of Asians and 38% of Hispanics). When asked which disease or ailment is the worst that could happen to them, blindness ranked first among African-Americans followed by AIDS/HIV. Hispanics and Asians ranked cancer first and blindness second, while Alzheimer's disease ranked first among non-Hispanic whites followed by blindness.

When asked about various possible consequences of vision loss, "quality of life" ranked as the top concern by non-Hispanic whites (73%) and Asians (68%) while African-Americans (66%) and Hispanics (63%) ranked "loss of independence" as number one. These and other findings from a new national public opinion poll commissioned by Research!America and the Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (AEVR) point to various perspectives among racial and [ethnic groups](#) regarding eye and vision health.

"Every segment of the population has major concerns about the impact of eye disorders on quality of life," said Mary Woolley, president and CEO of Research!America. "Individuals realize the importance of good eye health in maintaining productive lives and fear its loss. But the reality is that advances in the prevention and treatment of eye disorders will not be possible without stronger investments in research."

National support of research that focuses on improving the prevention and treatment of eye and vision disorders is considered a priority among a strong majority of respondents (83% of African-Americans and non-Hispanic whites, 80% of Asians and 79% of Hispanics). When told that the federal government spends on average \$2.10 per person each year on such research, half of African-Americans (51%) and Hispanics (50%) say this is not enough followed by non-Hispanic whites (47%) and Asians (35%). About half of all groups believe that non-governmental sectors - industry, patient groups and philanthropies - should also increase funding for eye and vision research (57% of Hispanics, 51% of African-Americans, 49% of Asians and 47% of non-Hispanic whites).

Knowledge about specific eye disorders was uneven among populations. More than half of all groups have heard of cataracts and glaucoma but fewer were aware of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and diabetic eye disease. Hispanics (35%) and Asians (31%) are more likely to say they have not heard of these conditions compared to 22% of non-Hispanic whites and African-Americans.

As for causes of eye disorders, a majority of all respondents (80% of non-Hispanic whites, 77% of Hispanics, 76% of Asians and 70% of African-Americans) believe that excessive sunlight or ultraviolet radiation is a risk factor for eye disease along with ethnic heritage (64% of Asians, 60% of non-Hispanic whites, 59% of Hispanics and 52% of African-Americans). Chronic exposure of eyes to sunlight can cause cataracts and macular degeneration as well as eye irritation. Minority groups are often at a higher risk for vision impairment and blindness due to higher rates of certain eye [conditions](#) such as glaucoma, cataract and diabetic retinopathy.

More than half of Asians (57%), Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites (52%) and a plurality of African-Americans (42%) agree that obesity is also associated with greater risk for eye disease, and 62% of Hispanics,

60% of Asians, 54% of non-Hispanic whites and 48% of African-Americans agree smoking is a risk factor. Research has shown the risks of AMD, diabetic retinopathy, cataract and glaucoma increase with obesity-related systemic diseases such as diabetes or a high body mass index (BMI), abdominal circumference or waist-hip ratio. Smoking also increases the risk of AMD, cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and chronic dry eye.

Looking ahead, many respondents believe health care costs from eye disorders will increase by the year 2050 (62% of non-Hispanic whites, 58% of Asians, 54% of Hispanics and 50% of African-Americans). A [June 2014 report by Prevent Blindness](#) estimates that the total cost of vision disorders is expected to reach \$717 billion in 2050 compared to the current annual cost of \$145 billion.

The poll, conducted by Zogby Analytics in August 2014 and supported by a grant from Research to Prevent Blindness (RPB), is a rigorous attitudinal survey among non-Hispanic whites and minority populations about eye health and research. The margin of error for the sample sizes range from +/-3.2 to +/-5.8 percentage points. To view the poll, visit: <http://www.researchamerica.org/uploads/AEVRRApoll.pdf>.

Read new fact sheet on cost and prevalence of vision and blindness in the U.S.

"AEVR thanks Research to Prevent Blindness for supporting this poll, which builds upon the first-ever attitudinal survey it conducted fifty years ago in 1965 and updated in 1976 and 1988," said James Jorkasky, executive director of AEVR. "Although vision loss remains top-of-mind, we must continue to educate and advocate for research, especially due to an increasing at-risk aging population, vision disorders resulting from chronic diseases, and the disproportionate incidence of [eye disease](#) in growing minority populations."

Among other findings:

- About half of all respondents say they would likely participate in a clinical trial for eye and [vision](#) research if recommended by a health care provider (52% of non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics, 49% of Asians and 48% of African-Americans).
- About half of all respondents say they have insurance coverage for routine eye exams or glasses (56% of Asians, 54% of Hispanics, 50% of non-Hispanic whites and 48% of African-Americans).
- A third of all respondents say they have eye exams less frequently than they would like because of their insurance situation (31% of African-Americans, 31% of Hispanics, and 29% of Asians and non-Hispanic whites).
- A strong majority of all respondents (90% of non-Hispanic whites, and 84% of African-Americans, Hispanics and Asians) agree that good [eye](#) health is important to overall health.

Provided by Research!America

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