



Congressional Vision Caucus

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 16, 2003

For more information:

Peter Mirijanian

202-857-0670

202-262-6333 (cell)

Betsy van Die

1-888-331-2020 ext. 322

CONGRESS FORMS VISION CAUCUS Bipartisan Coalition of House Members Cites Need for a National Policy Addressing Blindness Prevention

WASHINGTON – With 80 million Americans at risk of developing potentially blinding eye disease, a bipartisan coalition of Congressional Members today launched the Congressional Vision Caucus (CVC), dedicated to strengthening and stimulating a national dialogue and policy on vision-related problems and disabilities.

The CVC, co-chaired by Rep. Gene Green (D-TX), Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Rep. David Price (D-NC), and Rep. Patrick Tiberi (R-OH), will focus on three priority areas: research, prevention/public health, and access to treatment and rehabilitation.

The mission of the CVC will be to set forth a national vision strategy which raises awareness that the number of Americans at risk for age-related diseases is increasing as the baby-boomer generation ages; provide better understanding of the personal risk of vision loss and stress the importance of necessary steps to preserve and protect eyesight; inform communities so that they may prepare the treatment and rehabilitation services that will be needed; educate Members of Congress so they comprehend the scope of eye problems in our country; and ensure adequate resources are directed towards the research, prevention and treatment of eye disease.

“We are especially grateful to these Members of Congress for assuming a leadership role in America’s fight to prevent blindness and other eye disorders,” said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America (PBA), the nation’s leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight.

In 2002, PBA and The National Eye Institute (NEI) published *Vision Problems in the U.S. (VPUS)*, a groundbreaking assessment of vision problems in the country. The report highlighted the high prevalence of blindness and vision impairment, significant refractive error and the four leading eye diseases affecting older Americans: age-related macular degeneration (AMD), cataracts, diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma.

The *VPUS* report revealed that nearly 3.5 million Americans have low vision and 1.1 million are legally blind. And while it is believed that **half of all blindness can be prevented**, the number of Americans who suffer vision loss continues to increase. It is estimated that by 2030, the number of blind and visually impaired people will double if nothing is done to curb vision problems.

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, certified vision screening training, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information on the CVC, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the web at www.preventblindness.org.

###

* Editor's note: Interested in state-specific vision statistics? Check out *Vision Problems in the U.S.* statistics at http://www.preventblindness.org/vpus/vp_state_index.htm

