

Focus on Vision Care

It's Healthy Vision Month! Make your Vision Last a Lifetime

By Virginia Jacko, Guest Writer and Grantee



During Healthy Vision Month, the National Eye Institute (NEI) reminds everyone to make eye health a priority. It is a time to educate the public about what they can do to ensure their vision and eyes are healthy, and first on NEI's to-do list is to get a regular dilated eye examination which is the only way to detect eye diseases early, because with many, there are no warning signs.

The American Optometric Association also reminds parents that good vision is critical for many classroom tasks -- from reading books or seeing a blackboard to viewing a computer screen. A comprehensive eye examination for students is one of the most important "to-dos" for schoolchildren. Without an eye exam, many children will suffer from undetected vision problems, and some may even be misdiagnosed as having a learning disorder.

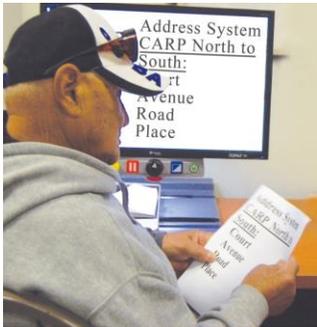
At Miami Lighthouse we have two important initiatives that address eye health at both ends of the age spectrum. Through our programs, schoolchildren who need corrective lenses and seniors with age-related vision loss have access to comprehensive, dilated eye examinations and functional vision assessments, not just during Healthy Vision Month but throughout the year.

When low-income schoolchildren fail Florida's state-mandated vision screenings and have no resources for eye care, our Florida Heiken Children's Vision Program is there to help. Following the Florida Statute, which sets standards of care, the Program provides an eye examination with dilation so that underlying medical conditions can be diagnosed and appropriate medical referrals made. Glasses are prescribed if required. These services are provided at no cost to the child's family. Since 1992, more than 85,000 schoolchildren throughout Florida have received a dilated eye exam and glasses.



Our recent market research survey confirms the American Optometric Association's emphasis on the importance of a comprehensive eye examination for schoolchildren: 74% of the 1,400 parents surveyed in Miami-Dade and Broward counties who responded said their child was doing better academically because of the free eye examination and glasses provided by our program.

At the other end of the age spectrum are seniors suffering from age-related vision loss. The number of people age 55 and older who suffer from blindness or low vision is expected to double by 2020. Low vision is a condition not correctable by standard eyeglasses, contact lenses, medicine, or surgery that interferes with a person's ability to perform everyday activities. One in four seniors over 75 will experience low vision due to age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, or diabetes, and one in four people with macular degeneration develop clinical depression. Most seniors with low vision will not be totally blind but will struggle with their loss of vision, a loss that will seriously impact their everyday lives unless they have access to, and training in, the use of low vision devices.



Our Vision Solutions Center professionals provide seniors the tools they need to cope with low vision and remain independent. Low-vision senior patients receive a functional vision assessment from our low vision optometrist who works with our occupational/low vision therapist and licensed dispensing optician to prescribe assistive devices. Our Vision Solutions Center professionals help seniors overcome the anxiety caused by low vision, and provide them with assistive devices to make the best use of their remaining vision. In a recent survey of 68 Miami Lighthouse low vision patients, 97% stated their quality of life improved because of Occupational Therapy intervention.

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