



The Eyes Have It



Baltimore's Visionary Fight Against Glaucoma

ver 7.0



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Glaucoma
Research Foundation



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Program Genesis

Glaucoma is a disease that affects over 70 million people worldwide. Glaucoma is present in about one percent (3,000,000) of Americans but remains undiagnosed in half of that population. It is the second leading cause of preventable blindness in the world after cataracts and is the leading cause of preventable blindness in African-Americans in the United States. Presently, there is no cure for glaucoma and there are often no warning signs. Thus, sight lost can never be recovered making early awareness and treatment the key to preventing unnecessary blindness. High-risk groups for glaucoma include, but are not limited to, people with a family history of glaucoma, people over sixty years of age, African-Americans over age 40 and diabetics. Baltimore City includes a high number of citizens who fall into the prominent high-risk groups.

Several sight-saving organizations are joining together in an exciting program to provide glaucoma screening and education to the people of Baltimore to prevent the unnecessary loss of vision from this disease. The participants of *The Eyes Have It Program* are:

- Baltimore City
- The Polakoff Foundation
- The Maryland Society for Sight
- Krieger Eye Institute at Sinai Hospital
- Glaucoma Research Foundation
- Anne Arundel Eye Center
- Maryland Optometric Association (MOA)

Half of the people with glaucoma don't know it because it usually destroys eyesight without any pain or warning sign. Glaucoma is often called "The Silent Thief" because, by the time people notice changes in their vision, glaucoma has already caused permanent damage. Sight destroyed by glaucoma cannot be restored. But if glaucoma is diagnosed in its earliest stages, it is usually a readily treated condition. That is why it is critical to provide screening and education to people before glaucoma robs them of their sight.

Program Objectives

- Create awareness at all levels of the City's population as to the risk of glaucoma and the importance of regular eye examinations to detect glaucoma.
- Offer free screenings at locations throughout the City.
- Assist low-income citizens with glaucoma who have no insurance by locating programs and/or doctors who will provide treatment at little or no cost.
- Position Baltimore as a model of a new, cooperative effort to fight glaucoma.

People At High-Risk For Glaucoma

People at high risk for glaucoma need to receive a dilated eye exam at least every two years. Individuals at high risk for glaucoma include, but are not limited to:

- African-Americans over age 40
- Everyone over age 60
- People with a family history of glaucoma
- People with diabetes
- People of Hispanic origin
- Extremely near or farsighted people
- Long-time users of steroid medications
- People who have experienced severe eye trauma

Among African-Americans, studies show that glaucoma is:

- Three to four times more likely to occur in African-Americans than in Caucasians;
- About six times more likely to cause blindness in African-Americans than in Caucasians;
- Fifteen times more likely to cause blindness in African-Americans between the ages of 45-64 than in Caucasians of the same age group.

Baltimore City has a high number of citizens who fall into high-risk groups.

Baltimore Eye Study

In the Baltimore Eye Study, a randomly selected sample of 2,395 African-Americans and 2,913 Caucasians 40 year of age and older in East Baltimore underwent detailed ophthalmic examinations. The study reported a prevalence of glaucoma of 1.7% among Caucasians and 5.6% among African-Americans. Primary open-angle glaucoma accounted for 19 percent of all blindness among African-Americans; it was six times as frequent among African-Americans as among Caucasians and began 10 years earlier on average.¹

The study concluded that half of all blindness in this urban population is probably preventable.

Signs And Symptoms

The following are some common signs and symptoms that strongly suggest one should be examined for glaucoma or other eye problems. But someone may have glaucoma even if symptoms are not experienced:

¹ Tielsch JM, Sommer A, Katz J, Royall RM, Quigley HA, Javitt J. Racial variations in the Prevalence of Primary Open Angle Glaucoma: The Baltimore Eye Survey. JAMA 1991; 266:369-374.

- Frequent changes of eyeglasses, none of which is satisfactory;
- Inability of the eyes to adjust to darkened rooms, such as movie theaters;
- Loss of vision;
- Blurred or foggy vision;
- Rainbow-colored rings around lights.

Treatment For Glaucoma

Medications may be either in the form of eye drops or pills. Some drugs are designed to reduce pressure by slowing the flow of fluid into the eye. Others help to improve fluid drainage. For most people with glaucoma, regular use of medications will control the increased fluid pressure. If drugs are prescribed, they usually must be used regularly for the rest of the patient's life.

Some glaucoma patients qualify for laser surgery. During laser surgery, a low intensity beam of light is focused on the part of the anterior chamber where the fluid leaves the eye. This results in cellular changes that make it easier for fluid to exit the eye. Over time, the effect of laser surgery may wear off. Patients who have this form of surgery may need to keep taking glaucoma drugs.

Surgery can also help fluid escape from the eye and thereby reduce the pressure. However, surgery is usually reserved for patients whose pressure cannot be controlled with eye drops, pills or laser surgery.

Conclusion

The Eyes Have It Program will help to reduce the loss of vision from glaucoma by educating the citizens of Baltimore about glaucoma, identifying those at risk of glaucoma, providing them with screening and educational information and referring those without insurance to free or low-cost follow-up care. Since glaucoma is hereditary, the positive effects of *The Eyes Have It Program* will resonate for decades as families learn about the dangers of glaucoma and pass this information on to children and grandchildren.

Healthy vision in the City means happier citizens who will maintain productive, vibrant lifestyles improving the City's economic and emotional outlook. A success with *The Eyes Have It Program* places Baltimore City at the forefront of groundbreaking territory with respect to government sponsored healthcare programs. It establishes Baltimore as a model of caring and excellence in government; a model to be celebrated and emulated in major cities throughout the United States.