



# Blindness Statistics

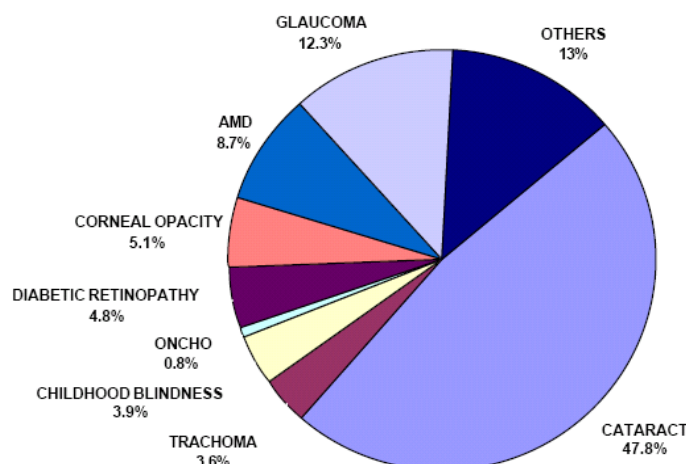
## Definitions

- **BLINDNESS** is defined as 'visual acuity of less than 3/60 or corresponding visual field loss in the better eye with best possible correction (category 3,4,5)'. **(A)** A simple definition of blindness, refers to a loss of vision resulting in a person being unable to walk unaided.
- **LOW VISION** corresponds to visual acuity of less than 6/18, but equal or better than 3/60 in the better eye with best possible correction (category 1,2). A person affected by low vision is also defined as one who – after treatment and refractive correction – has impairment of visual function but who uses or is potentially able to use vision for the planning and/or execution of a task. **(A)** In 2009, The World Health Organisation will no longer use the term "low-vision" and will instead use the more descriptive terms of "moderate visual impairment" and "severe visual impairment" in order to better estimate the need for vision care services. **(B)**

## The Causes of Blindness

- The main causes of blindness are cataract (47.8%), glaucoma (12.3%) and age related macular degeneration (8.7%). Other causes include corneal opacity (5.1%), diabetic retinopathy (4.8%), childhood blindness (3.9%), trachoma (3.6%), onchocerciasis (0.8%). **(C)**
- Blindness is most prevalent in developing countries where malnutrition, inadequate health and education services, poor water quality and a lack of sanitation leads to a high incidence of eye disease. **(A)**
- In Australia, around 444,400 people aged over 55 years are blind or visually impaired. **(H)** Most blindness in Australia is caused by age-related conditions, particularly age-related macular degeneration, cataract, diabetic eye disease, glaucoma and refractive error. The number of people affected is expected to double over the next 20 years as the population ages. **(D)**
- In Australia's Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander communities, cataract, diabetic retinopathy refractive error and trachoma are the leading causes of blindness and visual impairment. **(H)**

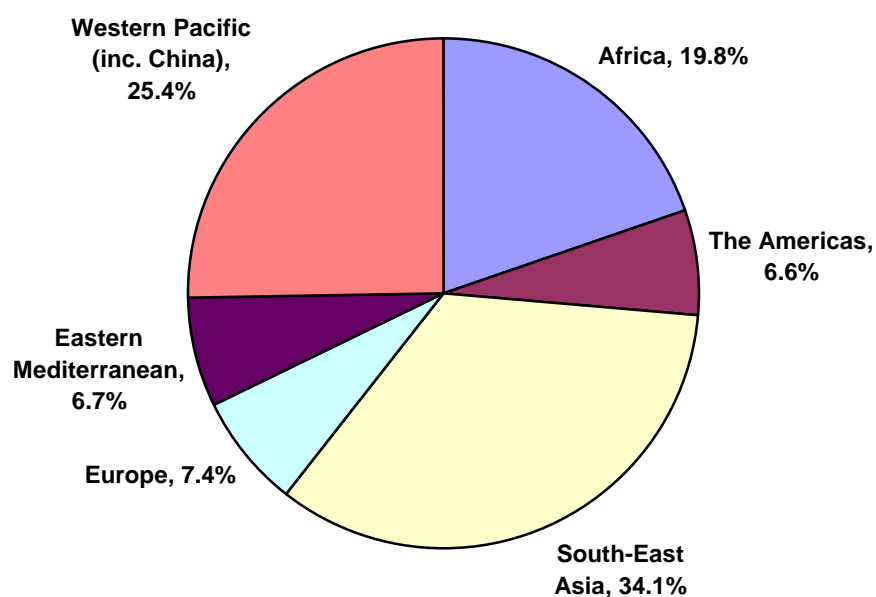
## Global Causes of Blindness as a Proportion of Total Blindness **(C)**



## Blindness Statistics

- An estimated 314 million people worldwide are visually impaired, of whom 124 million people have low vision and 45 million are blind. **(F)**
- More than 75% of the world's blindness is preventable or treatable. **(F)**
- Approximately 90% of people with vision impairment live in developing countries. **(F)**
- Blindness more often affects older people. More than 83% of people who are blind are aged over 50 years (yet this age group represented only 19% of the world's population). **(C)**
- An estimated 1.4 million children under the age of 15 are blind worldwide. **(C)**
- In some developing countries, up to 60% of children die within a year of becoming blind, either from the condition that caused the blindness (such as measles and vitamin A deficiency) or from inadequate care as families affected by poverty struggle to look after a disabled child. **(A)(G)**
- Blindness is both a cause and a result of poverty. Adults and children living in poverty are more likely to suffer from malnutrition, poor water quality and inadequate sanitation. This places them at much higher risk of contracting eye disease. **(A)**
- The annual global economic impact of blindness was estimated at US\$42 billion in 2000. **(E)**
- Around three-quarters of the world's blind children live in developing countries in Africa and Asia. **(F)**
- Some Indigenous Australian communities are affected by eye diseases at a rate that is ten times higher than found in other Australian communities. **(H)**

## Geographical distribution of the world's blindness **(E)**



## Cataract Blindness

- On a global scale, cataracts are the leading cause of blindness, accounting for approximately 48% of all blindness. (C)
- Cataract blindness can be treated with surgery. Cataract surgery is considered to be one of the most cost-effective forms of health intervention. (E)
- In some developing countries, the rate of cataract surgery is less than 250 operations per million people per year. This compares to a rate of up to 8,000 in some developed countries. (E)
- In Australia, the condition which leads to the largest single direct eye health cost is cataract blindness. VISION 2020 Australia estimates that treating cataracts will cost \$668 million per annum by the end of 2010. (D)

## Future Projections – VISION 2020

- The World Health Organisation estimates that without major intervention, the number of people who are blind will double to 76 million by 2020. (E)
- Without intervention the projected economic cost of blindness will rise from US\$42 billion in 2000, to US\$110 billion per annum by the year 2020 (in year 2000 \$ value). (E)
- VISION 2020: The Right to Sight is a joint initiative of the World Health Organisation and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness. VISION 2020: The Right to Sight was launched in 1999 and is a global campaign to eliminate avoidable blindness. The Fred Hollows Foundation is a partner in VISION 2020. Further information is available at [www.v2020.org](http://www.v2020.org)
- As well as alleviating individual suffering and reducing poverty, the VISION 2020: The Right to Sight campaign will reduce the economic burden of blindness to US\$58 billion per year in 2020, a global saving of US\$223 billion over 20 years (E)

## References

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- C. *Magnitude and causes of visual impairment*, Fact Sheet 282, World Health Organization, November 2004, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs282/en/index.html>
- D. *Annual Report 2006-2007*, VISION 2020 Australia [http://www.vision2020australia.org.au/assets/content/1884/07051%20Artwork\\_web\\_a.pdf](http://www.vision2020australia.org.au/assets/content/1884/07051%20Artwork_web_a.pdf)
- E. *State of the World's Sight, Vision 2020: The Right to Sight*. Executive Summary and full report pp 27-30 <http://www.v2020.org/page.asp?section=000100010015>
- F. *What is VISION2020? > VISION 2020 Global Facts*, VISION 2020, website accessed 13 May 2008 <http://www.v2020.org/page.asp?section=0001000100090002>
- G. *Childhood blindness in the context of Vision 2020 – The Right to Sight*, Clare Gilbert and Allen Foster, Bulletin of the World Health Organisation, 2001, 79 (3), 227-232
- H. *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Care Fact Sheet, VISION 2020 Australia*. [http://www.vision2020australia.org.au/assets/content/1284/ATSI\\_fact\\_sheet\\_28Aug07.pdf](http://www.vision2020australia.org.au/assets/content/1284/ATSI_fact_sheet_28Aug07.pdf)