



Blindness & Low-vision Fact Sheet

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What are blindness and low-vision?

- A blind person sees about 10 percent or less of what a sighted person can see. The legal definition of blindness is visual acuity, the clarity or sharpness of a person's vision,¹ of not greater than 20/200 in the better eye with correction or a field not subtending an angle greater than 20 degrees.²
- Low-vision refers to partial vision loss that cannot be corrected. A person with low-vision has severely reduced visual acuity, contrast sensitivity, or a significantly obstructed field of vision – or all three.³
- The vast majority of people who are blind or suffer from low-vision lose their vision later in life because of macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetes.⁴
 - With macular degeneration, central vision deteriorates, resulting in blurred vision and eventually leading to blindness.
 - Glaucoma causes damage to the optic nerve through pressure, compromising peripheral vision first.
 - Diabetic retinopathy is a complication of diabetes that occurs when diabetes damages the tiny blood vessels inside the retina. While there are treatments to delay these conditions, there is no cure.

Experiencing blindness or low-vision

- Nationally, among persons age 21 to 64 who are visually impaired, defined as any difficulty or inability to see words and letters even when wearing glasses or contact lenses, 55.3 percent are employed; among individuals unable to see words and letters, this figure decreases to 48 percent. This proportion is significantly lower than the

¹ "Visual Acuity: What is 20/20 Vision." American Optometric Association. Available online at <http://www.aoa.org/x4695.xml>.

² "Straightforward Answers about Blindness," National Federation of the Blind. Available online at http://www.nfb.org/nfb/Answers_about_Blindness.asp?SnID=492386486.

³ "All About Low Vision," Lighthouse International. Available online at <http://www.lighthouse.org/medical/low-vision-defined/>.

⁴ "Blindness and Low Vision Fact Sheet," National Federation of the Blind. Available online at http://www.nfb.org/nfb/fact_sheet-blindness_and_low_vision.asp?SnID=248306216.

approximately 88.2 percent of persons without any disability in this age group who are employed.⁵

- According to the National Federation for the Blind, the bigger problem of blindness is the misunderstanding and lack of information that exists, not the loss of eyesight itself.
- Assistive technology has become increasingly critical to people who are blind and have low-vision by providing tools that can help maintain a productive lifestyle.

How many people are blind or have low-vision?

- The World Health Organization estimates that nearly 314 million people globally are visually impaired; among these, 45 million are blind. Globally, nearly two-thirds of blind people are women.⁶
 - About 82 percent of all people who are visually impaired are 50 years and older.⁷
- It is estimated that as many as 10 million Americans are blind or visually impaired.⁸
 - Based on the National Health Interview Survey of 2002, 61 million Americans are at high risk of serious vision loss.⁹
- Studies show that over the next 30 years aging baby boomers will double the current number of blind or visually impaired Americans.¹⁰
- Just 1 percent of the blind population is born without sight. The vast majority of blind people lose their vision later in life because of macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetes.¹¹
 - Macular degeneration affects about 13 million Americans.
- The economic impact of vision impairment in the United States is an estimated \$51.4 billion.¹²
 - Many people with vision impairment need long-term services. The average lifetime cost for a person with vision impairment is estimated to be \$566,000 in 2003 dollars.¹³

⁵ Steinmetz, 2006. Available online at <http://www.lighthouse.org/research/statistics-on-vision-impairment/fags>.

⁶ World Health Organization, 2009.

⁷ World Health Organization, 2009.

⁸ "Blindness and Low Vision Fact Sheet," National Federation of the Blind. Available online at http://www.nfb.org/nfb/fact_sheet-blindness_and_low_vision.asp?SnID=248306216.

⁹ Zhang et al., 2007

¹⁰ "Blindness and Low Vision Fact Sheet," National Federation of the Blind. Available online at http://www.nfb.org/nfb/fact_sheet-blindness_and_low_vision.asp?SnID=248306216.

¹¹ "Blindness and Low Vision Fact Sheet," National Federation of the Blind. Available online at http://www.nfb.org/nfb/fact_sheet-blindness_and_low_vision.asp?SnID=248306216.

¹² Prevent Blindness America 2007

¹³ Honeycutt, et al., 2003