



**FIGHTING
BLINDNESS
CANADA** | **VAINCRE
LA CÉCITÉ
CANADA**

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

FIGHTING BLINDNESS CANADA

OCTOBER 2022



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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION #1:

Invest \$10M over five years (\$2M per year) to create a National Vision Health Desk to develop and implement a National Vision Strategy that will coordinate and address eye health across Canada.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Invest \$150 million in vision research over 5 years to stimulate innovation, build capacity and increase access to new treatments.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Remove the capital gains tax on charitable donations of private company shares and real estate to stimulate donations from the private sector.



INVESTING IN VISION AND EYE HEALTH

Vision health is a critical but often overlooked component of health care. Today, over 8 million Canadians – 1 in 5 – are living with one of the four major eye diseases (cataracts, age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma) and 1.2 million Canadians have uncorrectable vision loss or blindness. **Crucially, 75% cases of vision loss could be prevented if diagnosed early and had access to treatments.**

Vision loss has a profound impact on individuals, their families and society costing an estimated \$32.9 billion a year in Canada in health care, productivity and well-being costs. The consequences of vision loss extend well beyond the eye. People with vision loss:

- are three times more likely to experience clinical depression
- have double the risk of falls, the leading cause of injury-related hospitalizations for seniors
- are admitted to nursing homes three years earlier than individuals without vision loss
- experience three times higher unemployment than the general public.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put increased strain on an eye care system that was already struggling to provide timely access to diagnosis and treatment. And the needs will continue to grow as the population ages. The time to act is now. Fighting Blindness Canada is putting forward three recommendations to provide much needed investment and focus to improve vision care and eye health in Canada.

RECOMMENDATION #1:

Invest \$10M over five years (\$2M per year) to create a National Vision Health Desk to develop and implement a National Vision Strategy that will coordinate and address eye health across Canada.

Over the past two decades the Government of Canada has made repeated commitments on the international stage but failed to deliver a National Vision Health Strategy. [A Private Member's Bill \(C-284\)](#) to create such a strategy was tabled in 2022 and has the support of Fighting Blindness Canada (FBC) and the wider vision health community.

A National Vision Health Strategy will deliver a cohesive plan to develop vision health policies and priorities. FBC encourages the federal government to support this bill and provide the appropriate resourcing for this initiative.



The vision health community recommends establishing a National Vision Health Desk (NVHD) within the Public Health Agency of Canada and appointing a Chief Vision Health Officer to facilitate development of a National Vision Strategy.

The NVHD would be the national policy voice working with the provinces and territories on strategies for efficient, cost-effective access to eye health and vision care, supporting eye health promotion and disease prevention, providing advice to the Federal Government on eye drugs and technologies, and focusing resources on high-priority populations.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Invest \$150 million in vision research over 5 years to stimulate innovation, build capacity and increase access to new treatments.

Research has revolutionized vision care over the last few decades. Because of advances in technology, surgery and treatment, blindness for many is no longer the inevitable result of receiving a diagnosis of cataracts, glaucoma or age-related macular degeneration. Because of research, 3 out of 4 cases of vision loss could be prevented with early diagnosis and treatment.ⁱ

For over 8 million Canadians living with a blinding eye disease that puts them at risk of vision loss, research could develop treatment to stop their progression to vision loss.ⁱⁱ

For 1.2 million Canadians with uncorrectable vision loss, effective treatments do not exist to restore their sight. Research could change this result.ⁱⁱⁱ

And by 2050, the number of Canadians living with a blinding eye disease and at risk will grow from over 8 million to 13.9 million, and the number of Canadians living with uncorrectable vision loss will grow from 1.2 million to 2 million. The socio-economic impact will grow from \$32.9 billion to \$56 billion (in 2019\$).^{iv}

Research investment today can impact these projections in 2050. The need is urgent.

After decades of foundational research, innovative approaches in gene therapy, stem cells, and pharmaceuticals are leading to therapies for eye diseases that were once considered untreatable. Canada should be at the forefront of this revolution in eye care, however vision research has been chronically underfunded in this country.

- In Canada federal scientific research funding is less than 25% of overall research funding, well below the OECD average.
- Canada lags significantly behind the U.S. and many European countries in recruiting clinical trials. This leads to delays in access to innovative and in many cases first in class treatment.



- There is no dedicated funding stream for vision research within the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). While vision is part of the mandate of the Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction, it is not a strategic priority or even mentioned outside of the official mandate statement in the current Strategic Plan. In contrast in the US, eye health is prioritized by the NIH through the National Eye Institute which received in 2022 \$858.5 million US in funding.^v This dedicated funding allows the research community to respond to the vision loss communities' needs and capitalize more efficiently on innovation.

As the largest charitable funder of vision research in the country, FBC has invested over \$40 million to build capacity and fund innovative research to restore sight. We urge the federal government to create a dedicated funding pool for vision research. This fund would support the spectrum of vision research from discovery science to translational research to clinical trials and vision rehabilitation and help retain talent in Canada.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Remove the capital gains tax on charitable donations of private company shares and real estate to stimulate donations from the private sector.

Canada's 86,000 registered charities provide crucial support to vulnerable communities and vital funding for research. Up to \$200 million in donations could be accessed by changes in tax regulations.

Fighting Blindness Canada recommends that the federal government through the Canada Revenue Agency review existing tax measures available to both individual and corporations including giving the same tax treatment to donations of shares in private companies and real estate as given to gifts of publicly traded shares to encourage giving and support the charitable sector.

ABOUT FIGHTING BLINDNESS CANADA

Fighting Blindness Canada (FBC) is the largest charitable funder of vision research in Canada. Over our 48-year history, FBC has contributed critical funding for the development of sight-saving treatments and cures for blinding eye diseases. By raising and stewarding funds, FBC is helping drive forward research that supports our goal of understanding why vision loss occurs, how it can be slowed and how sight can be restored.

We are an invaluable resource for individuals and families impacted by blindness, providing accurate eye health information through our website and educational events, as well as



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engaging with government and other stakeholders to advance better vision health policies.
[FightingBlindness.ca](https://www.fightingblindness.ca)

ⁱ Deloitte Access Economics, The cost of vision loss and blindness in Canada, May 2021 accessed on October 1, 2022 at <https://www.fightingblindness.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Deloitte-Cost-of-vision-loss-and-blindness-in-Canada-report-May-2021.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v National Eye Institute, CONGRESSIONAL JUSTIFICATION FY 2022 accessed on October 1, 2022
https://www.nei.nih.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06/NEI_FY2022_CJ.pdf