

## SPRING 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

Your support moves innovative vision research forward.

Tips to make your eye health a priority.

Keeping our Eye on the Cure.

Report shows eye healthcare is still not back to pre-pandemic levels.

# YOUR SUPPORT MOVES INNOVATIVE VISION RESEARCH FORWARD

With support from generous donors, Fighting Blindness Canada (FBC) is investing in the best, most promising vision research to advance knowledge and treatments for blinding eye diseases. FBC-funded research spans across many eye diseases such as...

Inherited Eye Diseases	Age-Related Macular Degeneration	Glaucoma & Optic Nerve	Diabetic Eye Disease
Corneal Disease	Retinopathy Of Prematurity	Retinal Detachment	Uveitis

In 2022, we invested over \$2.6 million in sight-saving research that funded 35 projects seeking to improve and restore sight. The significant milestones and research advancements achieved in 2022 would not have been possible without you, bringing the vision loss community greater hope and leading us into 2023 stronger than ever. Thank you for being part of these achievements!



# TIPS TO MAKE YOUR EYE HEALTH A PRIORITY

Your eye health is important and a critical part of your overall health and wellbeing. Below are some key tips on how to make your eye health a priority.



## 1. Protect your eyes

Make sure to protect your eyes from both the sun and potential injury. Sunglasses help protect your eyes from harmful UV rays. Choose sunglasses that shield against both UVA and UVB for maximum protection. The level of protection should be printed on the tag, and the higher the level of protection the better. If you have age-related macular degeneration (AMD) or diabetes-related vision loss, amber or brown lenses might also help by increasing contrast.

Remember to also protect your eyes from injury by wearing safety glasses or protective eyewear when using hazardous materials at home or work, doing construction projects or playing contact sports.

## 2. Visit your eye doctor regularly

Regular eye exams are key to maintaining your eye health. Many eye diseases do not have symptoms in the early stages, so having a comprehensive exam is essential to identify any problems. In addition to checking if you need corrective lenses, your eye doctor will do tests to check the health of your retina, your eye pressure and more.

## 3. Practice a balanced diet

Maintaining a healthy balanced diet is important for long-term health, as well as your vision. Certain nutrients in food may help to reduce the risk of vision conditions including AMD, diabetes-related eye disease, and cataracts.

### Some of the best foods for eye health include:

- Fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids like tuna, salmon, and trout.
- Green leafy vegetables containing lutein, zeaxanthin and vitamin C, like spinach and kale.
- Nuts and legumes rich in vitamin E, including walnuts, cashews, and peanuts.
- Citrus fruits that are rich in vitamin C like oranges and grapefruit.
- Carrots and sweet potatoes for vitamin A and beta carotene.

## 4. Take breaks

We are surrounded by screens, including our TVs, computers, phones, and more! When we spend too long looking at these devices it can cause eyestrain, dry eyes, headaches, and pain. To help protect your eyes, take screen breaks every 20 minutes by looking away from the screen for at least 20 seconds. If you are looking at the screen for prolonged periods of time, remember to get up at least every 2 hours to stretch or move your body. If you get dry eyes, artificial tears can help. Talk to your pharmacist or eye doctor to find a brand that works for you.

# KEEPING OUR EYE ON THE CURE

For the second year in a row, three teams of Canadian researchers working to find treatments for blinding eye diseases vied for coveted prizes at our Eye on the Cure awards competition, presented by FYidoctors.



**The Eye on the Cure awards competition,** moderated by health journalist and former Medical Correspondent for CTV National News, Avis Favaro, had teams going head-to-head in front of three judges and members of the Academy, with \$100,000 in FBC-funding up for grabs to advance vision research.

Expert judges and an Academy made up of committed supporters voted for the winner of the \$50,000 FYidoctors Research to Watch Award, and the public was invited to vote for the winner of the \$30,000 Heathbridge Capital People's Choice Award.

It was an exciting event! Thank you to the wonderful scientist teams who inspired and entertained us while showcasing their passion for vision research.

**“Now more than ever, it is so important to encourage and invest in the research of tomorrow. We are excited to have the opportunity to spotlight and support these talented researchers as they work to develop new diagnostics and treatments for vision loss.”**

**- Dr. Larissa Moniz, FBC's Director of Research and Mission Programs.**

# **|| EYE ON THE CURE AWARD WINNERS**

## **Winner of the \$50,000 FYidoctors Research to Watch Award**

**Dr. Bob Chow and Dr. Bridget Ryan (University of Victoria)**

### **Uncovering a link between Stargardt Disease and Inflammation**

Stargardt disease is an inherited retinal disease that causes progressive vision loss starting with loss of central vision. There are currently no treatments for Stargardt disease. Research suggests that the mutations that cause Stargardt disease increase inflammation in the retina which contributes to the death of light-sensing photoreceptor cells. Dr. Chow and Dr. Ryan will test if dampening a specific type of inflammatory response increases photoreceptor cell survival and preserves vision in an animal model of Stargardt disease. If successful, this could lead to a new therapy for Stargardt disease.

## **Winner of the \$30,000 Heathbridge Capital People's Choice Award**

**Dr. Anna Ells (University of Calgary) and Dr. Ellen Zhou (University of Toronto)**

### **Optimizing treatment in retinopathy of prematurity**

Retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) is an eye disease that can happen to babies who are born prematurely causing vision loss or in severe cases blindness. Over the past 15 years a new treatment for ROP called anti-VEGF has been used to treat the disease. Dr. Ells and Dr. Zhou's study will compare two commonly used anti-VEGF drugs, to determine if there are differences in safety, effectiveness or impact on childhood development.

## **Winner of the \$10,000 Inspiration Award**

**Dr. Patrick Gooi and Dr. Abdullah Al-Ani (University of Calgary)**

### **Developing a new surgical device for glaucoma**

Glaucoma is the leading cause of blindness worldwide. It is caused when an increase in eye pressure damages cells in the optic nerve. The optic nerve carries light signals to the brain and death of optic nerve cells leads to irreversible vision loss. Dr. Gooi and Dr. Al-Ani are developing a new surgical device that they hope will improve eye pressure after glaucoma surgery, and preserve sight.

**A BIG thank you to everyone who joined us for Eye on the Cure and cast a vote in support of vision research. Thank you to our event sponsors, and all participating scientists!**

Missed the awards competition?  
Watch the show at  
**[FBCeyontheCure.ca](http://FBCeyontheCure.ca)**

# REPORT SHOWS EYE HEALTHCARE IS STILL NOT BACK TO PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS

A landmark report on **The Impact of Covid-19 on Vision Health in Canada** was released on **World Sight Day, October 13, 2022**. The report, a joint study by **Fighting Blindness Canada** and the **Canadian Council of the Blind**, evaluated if eye healthcare services are recovering after large disruptions in 2020 early in the pandemic.

The report found, that while eye healthcare services did improve in 2021, they did not get back to pre-pandemic levels seen in 2019, raising concerns that Canadians' eye health is in jeopardy.

## Findings from the report:

- 2/3 of Canadians did not have an eye examination in 2021.
- 1.8 million fewer visits to optometrists compared to 2019.
- 108,223 fewer eye surgeries compared to 2019 (a 20% decrease).
- 2+ years to clear the backlog of surgeries with further investments required.

While financial investments by the federal and provincial governments helps, it is only part of the solution to solving critical gaps in eye healthcare, which will only become more severe as Canada's population ages.

That is why we're working with a coalition of vision partners to support the establishment of a National Eye Care Strategy, through passage of Bill C-284. The impact of the pandemic on eye healthcare makes it clear that Canadians need a National Eye Care Strategy. Keep reading to learn more about Bill C-284 and how you can show your support.

To access full findings and download the report, visit **StopVisionLoss.ca**



Interested in getting involved with FBC?



We would love to hear from you! We have various volunteer opportunities available.

To learn more, contact **1.800.461.3331 x 231** or **volunteer@fightingblindness.ca**

# CANADIANS NEED A NATIONAL EYE CARE STRATEGY

Did you know 75% of vision loss cases could be prevented or treated if caught early? Advocating on behalf of Canadians' eye health is our priority to help prevent vision loss.



In 2022, in the House of Commons, the Honourable Judy Sgro, Member of Parliament for Humber River-Black Creek, introduced Bill C-284 to establish a National Eye Care Strategy. We applaud this step. For years, Fighting Blindness Canada in partnership with other vision organizations has advocated for a National Eye Care Strategy. This strategy is necessary to focus awareness and resources on eye health and the impact it has on well-being.

When introducing the Bill, Mrs. Sgro said “Mr. Speaker, I am very happy today to have the opportunity to introduce this Bill calling for a national strategy on eye care, something that, for many years, Canadians have been calling for, and something that the government has promised many times.”

Mrs. Sgro cited the over 8 million Canadians living with a blinding eye disease as why the House needs to pass this Bill. “I ask all of my colleagues to just imagine how their lives would change if they lost their eyesight. We take it for granted, and we do not stop to think about it enough. Over 8 million people currently live with a blinding eye disease that puts them at risk.”

The Bill's first reading motion was adopted and the Bill will soon move to a second reading. We urge you to send a letter to your Member of Parliament to encourage them to support this Bill.

Learn more and send a prewritten letter at [EyeCareStrategy.ca](https://www.EyeCareStrategy.ca)

## Bring a Bright Future into Focus with Monthly Giving

Help change the lives of people living with vision loss by joining our monthly giving program.

For information, contact Josie Koumandaros [1.800.461.3331](tel:18004613331) x 262 [jkoumandaros@fightingblindness.ca](mailto:jkoumandaros@fightingblindness.ca)



# CYCLE FOR SIGHT VOLUNTEER SHARES WHAT IT MEANS TO BE PART OF THE MOVEMENT

This year, Cycle for Sight marks 15 years of fundraising for vision research! We connected with volunteer, Demitrios Kotsambouyoukas to learn what inspires him to join the event each year...

## 1. What inspires you to participate in Cycle for Sight?

I was inspired to join Cycle for Sight because of a family member who was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa at a young age. It is someone very close to my heart that I have watched grow up into a smart, fun-loving, and very talented young person. I joined Cycle for Sight in June 2014, and I am amazed and excited that this year will be my 10<sup>th</sup> year participating.

## 2. What do you enjoy most about the event?

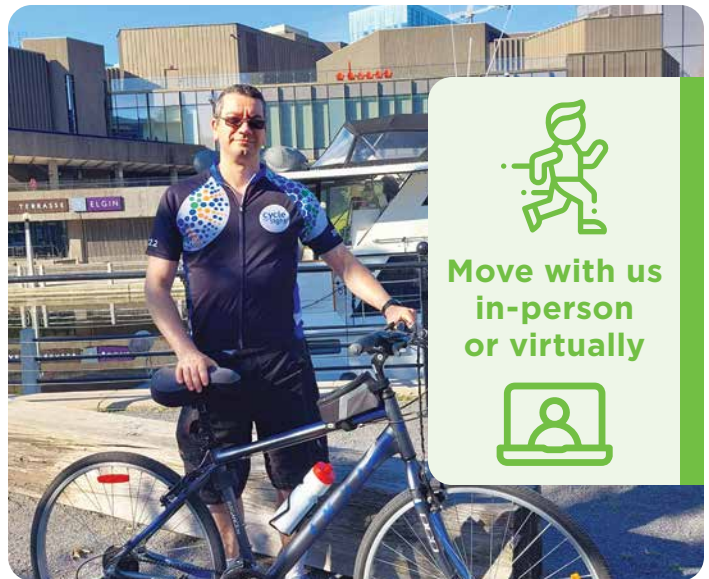
Every year, I look forward to Cycle for Sight because it allows me to take a break from my busy schedule to do things I love; go on a road trip, cycling and fitness, meeting new people, and hearing others' stories.

## 3. What are you looking forward to in 2023?

The atmosphere at Cycle for Sight is always fun and supportive. It gives me a sense of accomplishment and makes me look forward to the next one!

## 4. Do you have tips for cyclists looking to join Cycle for Sight for the first time?

If you like to move and shake the pandemic blues, join this event! If choosing to join by cycling, I recommend a pre-event workout to help complete your kilometers goals. The important thing to remember is that you can compete at your own pace. In regards to fundraising, I find it best to spread the word through friends, family, and co-workers. Fundraising towards vision research gives hope that with research, new sight-saving treatments are not far away.



## Participating in Cycle for Sight is easy!

Move with us and help raise funds for sight-saving research by joining Cycle for Sight this June. You can also join virtually, and take part with your activity of choice, anywhere and anytime! Learn more and register at [cycleforsight.ca](https://cycleforsight.ca)

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## View Point Education Series

Join us to learn from vision health experts and researchers. This year, View Point will include webinars and two in-person education events; Calgary, May 6, 2023 and Toronto, fall 2023. Register at [fightingblindness.ca/events](https://fightingblindness.ca/events)

## Comic Vision

Comic Vision returns in person May 11, 2023 in Toronto! The laughter will be flowing with a hilarious line up of seasoned comedians. Tickets on sale now at [comicvision.ca](https://comicvision.ca)