REPORT

Launch of the European Coalition for Vision (ECV) and European Elections Manifesto 2014

European Parliament
Hosted by MEP Marian HARKIN (ALDE, IE)
with the support of MEP Catherine STIHLER (S&D, UK) & MEP Elisabetta GARDINI (EPP, IT)

Tuesday 4 February 2014, The European Parliament – Strasbourg
Winston Churchill (WIC) building 10.00 – 12.00
Background

Numbers
An extensive review of epidemiological data has been made by the 2010 Global Burden of Disease Vision Loss Group. This study gives a total for all of Europe of 25 million with visual impairment (2,736,000 blind + 22,176,000 Low Vision)\(^1\).

Of a total population of 889 million this represents 2.8%.

Many more people (estimated number more than 70 million) have eye diseases that are in the early stages – which if left untreated will cause disabling impairment.

Causes of blindness in Western Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>% of blindness</th>
<th>% of seriously disabling visual impairment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macular degeneration</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cataract</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncorrected refractive error</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glaucoma</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetic retinopathy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2/3 of visual impairment in Western Europe today is avoidable – it could be easily treated and sight restored.

But inadequate and inequitable services mean 8.5m people in Western Europe live with a disabling vision problem.

The European Coalition for Vision has come together to call on the European Union institutions to use their power and influence to support our work in addressing these challenges.

\(^1\) Rupert R A Bourne et al, on behalf of the Vision Loss Expert Group of the Global Burden of Disease Study manuscript to be published in The Lancet Global Health 2014. To be E-Published in February 2014.
Launch of the European Coalition for Vision (ECV)

The event was the official launch of the European Coalition for Vision (ECV), which is an alliance made up of professional bodies, patient groups, European NGOs, disabled people's organisations and associations of health technology providers representing suppliers. The coalition exists to raise the profile of eye health and vision, help prevent avoidable visual impairment and secure an equal and inclusive society for those with irreversible blindness or low vision in Europe.
Both today’s rise in diabetes and an ageing Europe threaten to increase the numbers of avoidably vision impaired and blind persons. There is an urgent need to address the gaps in eye health provision in Europe, and to promote the rights of the blind and partially sighted so that they can live a life of equal opportunities within a socially inclusive Europe. Evidence is on the table: the extensive review of epidemiological data made by the 2010 Global Burden of Disease Vision Loss Group made it clear that in all of Europe there are 25 million people with visual impairment. We may not forget that inadequate and inequitable services mean 8.5 million people in Western Europe live with a disabling vision problem.

The creation of a coalition is an excellent opportunity to give greater visibility to such an important public health challenge which can affect people of all ages. The main causes of blindness are well-known for the eye-health community but not for the general public: macular degeneration, cataract, uncorrected refractive error, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy. But the most important message for us is that 2/3 of visual impairment in Western Europe today is avoidable, it could be easily treated and sight restored.
May I address the importance of prevention in the early stages of life, especially in children. Many more people have eye diseases that are in the early stages – which if left untreated will cause disabling impairment. Giving an example, a specific visual defect called Amblyopia, more commonly known as “lazy eye”, which certainly represents one of the main causes of poor vision in children.

Uncorrected refractive error can mean that a child can struggle to read a white or black board, or their text books in school. Amblyopia can be remedied by correcting refractive error only if diagnosed before the child’s 5th-6th birthday. Indeed this defect is a common problem which typically results in poor vision in one eye. The condition can be effectively treated in early childhood, but loss of vision in that eye is permanent if left undetected until later on.

This is a perfect example where the European Coalition for Vision can make a difference: we hope that with better public awareness of this condition and increased implementation of screening so that many more children will be diagnosed in time and will not carry a curable impairment into adulthood. The presented Manifesto could be an important tool to raise visibility of this issue under the next Parliament which could encourage a coalition of MEPs from different political groups to deal with this relevant issue after the elections.
Today, we have celebrated two important developments: the development of the European Coalition for Vision and the publication of the vision and eye-health Manifesto.

The Manifesto prepared by the European Coalition for Vision is very important in time when we, all together, members of the European Parliament can give support to this Coalition. By signing the Manifesto we can give hope for those who live with visual impairment or who are in danger of sight loss that the new European Parliament will not neglect their situation and these very important issue will get the political attention it deserves in the upcoming political cycles.

The breadth of membership in that coalition can ensure that every dimension of the problem, including eye health, visual impairment and disability aspects, vision and correction of sight-loss, provision of glasses and contact-lenses, prevention of avoidable blindness will get more attention in the future. May I encourage you to help the representation of that issue and to sign that document so that the Coalition could continue its valuable work on eye health, vision and visual impairment.

Catherine Stihler (S&D, UK) “More needs to be done to ensure rehabilitation, accessibility of products and services for vision-impaired persons”
European Elections Manifesto 2014

Peter Ackland, chief executive of the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB): “Time has come for European Institutions to address the eye health challenges and the ECV manifesto is open to anyone who is committed to help.”

25 million Europeans are suffering from serious vision impairment, including 2.7 million people who are blind. Two-thirds of these cases could be treated or prevented. The cost to individuals, their families, Member States and the EU as a whole, undermines European goals of social cohesion and participation, and hinders economic growth and development.

The solutions- proven, simple and cost-effective- are available but overlooked in the same way as the crisis: regular eye care for all, easy access to care and rapid intervention when necessary will tackle most of this burden. People living in Europe would benefit greatly from improved eye health; and for Member States healthcare savings and productivity gains would be considerable. Therefore we urge the European Parliament to address this challenge under its next mandate.

People living with sight loss have the same rights as those without a disability but often these rights are not fulfilled. Europe must do better in providing rehabilitation programmes, assistive devices and removal of barriers to access health, education, social support and employment. We call on the European Parliament to use its significant powers to improve the lives of people affected by sight loss.
Call to action for Members of the European Parliament (MEP)

**ENCOURAGE** the European Commission and EU Member States to prioritise vision and eye health as part of their public health strategies.

**ADOPT** an EP resolution to encourage Member States to ensure fair and equitable access to eye care, including free sight tests and treatment, for the most at risk and vulnerable groups (including those on low incomes).

**ENSURE** all relevant legislation and regulations improve access to and use of eye care services and promote an inclusive society that supports the rights and independence of blind and partially sighted people.

**IMPROVE** the consistency and standard of EU and Member State data collection on the status of vision and eye health and the inclusion of people with sight loss.

Read the [European Coalition for Vision (ECV) Manifesto for the European Parliament elections](#)

**Who can sign the election manifesto?** Current Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) standing for re-election, new MEP candidates and interested stakeholders, private persons and organisations who are committed to improve eye health throughout Europe and contribute to prevent avoidable vision impairment.

Interested in signing up to the ECV Manifesto? - Contact information

**Zoe Gray, Advocacy Manager** with the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), at ☎️ zgray@iapb.org or Tel.: +442079588254
MEPs who signed the ECV Manifesto in relation to the ECV launch event:

- Marian Harkin (ALDE, IE)
- Elisabetta Gardini (EPP, IT)
- Catherine Stihler (S&D, UK)
- Marianne Thyssen (EPP, BE)
- Ivo Belet (EPP, BE)
- Emer Costello (S&D, IE)
- Kinga Göncz (S&D, HU)

(source of the photos © Photo EXPRESSION Marc Dossmann)