



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## 1 billion people with presbyopia: half a billion without glasses

All of us will experience deteriorating sight as we get older. By the age of 45, the lens in our eyes will start to lose its elasticity, affecting our ability to focus on near objects – usually meaning we need reading glasses. This is called presbyopia.

A comprehensive study, published in the December issue of the academic journal *Archives of Ophthalmology*, estimates that 1.04 billion people in the world experience vision impairment caused by presbyopia. The research, undertaken by Professor Brien Holden, CEO of the International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE), and colleagues, not only provides the first comprehensive global estimate of the extent of presbyopia.

According to Professor Holden, the study revealed that an estimated 517 million had either no eyeglasses or inappropriate eyeglasses. As a result their ability to complete important daily tasks is restricted. Most (386 million, or 94 percent) lived in the developing world.

Professor Holden said the study, "Is a vitally important illustration of one of our greatest public health issues – the number of people who have impaired vision due to uncorrected or undercorrected presbyopia and the drastic effects that has on their everyday lives."

In the developed world, most people have access to the necessary eye examination and vision correction for presbyopia (usually a pair of glasses), that will allow them to complete a range of important tasks requiring the ability to see close objects clearly. However, in the developing world a massive number of people are prevented from completing these same tasks because they do not have glasses and the impact on their lives is enormous.

"The estimated global economic impact of avoidable blindness and vision impairment is US\$42 billion. At least half of this is due to uncorrected refractive error, such as presbyopia. We simply can't afford not to address it," Professor Holden said today.

The researchers now predict that the worldwide prevalence of presbyopia will increase to 1.4 billion people by 2020 and to 1.8 billion people by 2050.

"Without urgent intervention to provide training and education such as that delivered by ICEE to make spectacles more accessible, the global number of people who will suffer from a disability associated with uncorrected presbyopia is predicted to grow to 563 million people by 2020," he said.

### International Centre for Eyecare Education

Level 4 North Wing Rupert Myers Building  
Gate 14 Barker St UNSW Sydney NSW 2052

#### Postal Address

PO Box 6328 UNSW 1466 Sydney NSW  
Australia

T 1300 664 233 T +61 2 9385 7435

F +61 2 9385 7436 E [icee@icee.org](mailto:icee@icee.org)

[www.icee.org](http://www.icee.org)

ABN 86 081 872 586



The International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE), as a partner in Vision 2020: The Right to Sight, is working to help build sustainable eye care services throughout the world to eliminate avoidable blindness and vision impairment due to uncorrected refractive error by the year 2020.

The authors suggest that for the goals of Vision 2020 to be achieved, it must also address the problem of uncorrected presbyopia and plan for the "Provision of human resources, affordable spectacles and systems of delivery for these half-billion people in need."

Although presbyopia creates refractive error, World Health Organisation estimates have not previously included the burden of vision impairment caused by uncorrected presbyopia in their estimates of uncorrected refractive error.

Professor Holden and colleagues argue that, "The combination of the high prevalence in older adults and the low rates of spectacle access in some communities means that presbyopia has the potential to cause a global burden of vision loss worthy of attention."

The research study was supported by a public health grant from the Institute for Eye Research.

The study authors are Brien A Holden, Timothy R. Fricke, S. May Ho, Reg Wong, Gerhard Schlenther, Sonja Cronje, Anthea Burnett, Eric Papas, Kovin S. Naidoo & Kevin D. Frick.

Results of the study are published in the article, 'Global Vision Impairment Due to Uncorrected Presbyopia', *Archives of Ophthalmology*, Vol 126 (No. 12), Dec 2008.

To view the article go to: <http://archophth.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/126/12/1731>

For images, interviews and further information please contact:

Stephen Davis, International Centre for Eyecare Education  
T: +61 2 9385 7356 M: +61 450 661 695 E: [s.davis@ier.org.au](mailto:s.davis@ier.org.au)

**International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE)** is a global non-profit, non-government organisation. In the last ten years ICEE has delivered sustainable eye care services, education and training programmes in more than 40 countries. ICEE is focused on the elimination of avoidable blindness by developing solutions with communities in need of eye care thereby improving opportunities in education, employment and quality of life.

ICEE Offices are located in:

Sydney, Australia – Durban, South Africa – Colombo, Sri Lanka - Calabar, Nigeria – Kampala, Uganda and Latin America

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Level 4 North Wing Rupert Myers Building  
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**Postal Address**

PO Box 6328 UNSW 1466 Sydney NSW  
Australia

**T** 1300 664 233      **T** +61 2 9385 7435

**F** +61 2 9385 7436      **E** [icee@icee.org](mailto:icee@icee.org)

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