

# New campaign highlights urgent need for action to address the growing crisis of preventable vision loss and blindness

Oct 14, 2021

- *This World Sight Day, Fighting Blindness Canada and the Canadian Council of the Blind have partnered with Novartis Canada to launch “All Eyes on You”, a campaign urging Canadians to lend their voices and advocate for a national vision health plan*
- *Vision loss can be prevented in 75 per cent of cases through early diagnosis and treatment<sup>1,3</sup>*
- *Access to key ophthalmological services and therapies is imperative to help solve this pressing health issue*

**Dorval, Quebec, October 14, 2021** — Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. (Novartis) is marking World Sight Day with the launch of “All Eyes on You” in partnership with Fighting Blindness Canada and the Canadian Council of the Blind. The campaign spotlights the steadily growing crisis of preventable vision loss and blindness in Canada and urges the government to take action.<sup>1,2</sup>

The [Cost of Vision Loss and Blindness in Canada \(PDF 2.0 MB\)](#) report revealed that over 8 million Canadians are living with vision-threatening diseases, of which, 1.2 million are living with vision loss.<sup>1</sup> Encouraging Canadians to follow through with key ophthalmological services like regular eye exams to promote early diagnosis and granting access to innovative therapies can help prevent three out of four cases of vision loss.<sup>1,3</sup>

“Vision loss, while life-altering, can be prevented in most cases. At Novartis, we are building a foundation to make this a reality for Canadians and help protect their future vision health,” said Andrea Marazzi, Country Pharma Organization Head, Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. “Through our work with Fighting Blindness Canada and the Canadian Council of the Blind, we hope to bring attention to this pressing health issue. Collaboration with government and healthcare stakeholders will be key in enabling access to the necessary ophthalmological services and innovative therapies to reimagine vision health in Canada.”

Given the most prevalent eye diseases associated with vision loss are linked to aging, as Canada’s population ages, we can expect to see an increase in vision loss.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the report cautions that the prevalence of Canadians living with vision-threatening diseases could rise to 13.8 million by 2050 if no action is taken.<sup>1</sup>

“Vision loss can completely change the trajectory of day-to-day life, causing barriers to employment, social marginalization, and increased strain on families and caregivers. A person faced with vision loss or blindness can feel isolated, which in turn can negatively impact their well-being, and for older populations in particular, it can lead to increased risk of injury and falls,” said Doug Earle, President and Chief Executive Officer, Fighting Blindness Canada. “As Canada’s population ages, and with nearly a quarter of the population currently living with a vision-threatening disease, we must act now to support the vision health of Canadians.”<sup>1,3</sup>

This campaign is the vision loss community’s rallying cry to establish a national vision health plan, to enact measures that will help protect the vision health of Canadians and for increased funding to be allocated to

vision research.

“In 2003, the Canadian government committed to the World Health Organization that it would develop a vision health plan for Canada by 2007 and implement it by 2009. Although this commitment was reiterated multiple times since it was originally made, nearly thirteen years have passed, and the government has not taken necessary action,” said Michael Baillargeon, Senior Advisor of Government Relations and Special Projects, Canadian Council of the Blind. “Not only does vision loss have devastating impacts on the individual and their loved ones, but it also costs an estimated \$32.9 billion annually through economic and lost well-being costs, and this number is only expected to rise. Our message is clear: all eyes are on the government to address this crisis.”<sup>1,4</sup>

The issue is more pressing than ever: a recent update to the report outlined that an estimated 1,437 Canadians have lost vision as a result of COVID-19 due to either delayed eye exams or reduced interventions.<sup>5</sup> Modelling suggests that the additional economic cost of vision loss due to the pandemic is estimated to be \$1.4 billion between 2021 and 2023.<sup>5</sup>

Canadians are encouraged to lend their voices to “All Eyes on You” by using #StopPreventableBlindness on social media and by signing the petition for a national vision health plan at <https://www.StopVisionLoss.ca>, an advocacy website established and managed by Fighting Blindness Canada and the Canadian Council of the Blind.

#### **About Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc.**

Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc., a leader in the healthcare field, is committed to the discovery, development and marketing of innovative products to improve the well-being of all Canadians. In 2020, the company invested \$45 million in research and development in Canada. Located in Dorval, Quebec, Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. employs approximately 1,000 people in Canada and is an affiliate of Novartis AG, which provides innovative healthcare solutions that address the evolving needs of patients and societies. The company prides itself on its commitment to diversity and to nurturing an inclusive and inspiring environment. Novartis is recognized as a Great Place to Work<sup>®</sup>, ranked among the Top 50 Best Workplaces<sup>™</sup> in the country and is proudly named on the 2021 Best Workplaces<sup>™</sup> for Women in Canada and Best Workplace<sup>™</sup> for Mental Wellness lists. For further information, please consult <https://www.novartis.com/ca-en>.

#### **About Fighting Blindness Canada**

Fighting Blindness Canada (FBC) is the largest charitable funder of vision research in Canada. FBC has invested over \$40 million in sight-saving cures and treatments research for blinding eye diseases. With the support of its generous donors, FBC has funded over 200 research grants that have led to over 600 discoveries such as stem cell research, neuroprotective therapies, technological developments, pharmaceuticals, and gene therapies. Visit <https://www.fightingblindness.ca> or call 1 800 461 3331 to learn more.

#### **About the Canadian Council of the Blind**

The Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB) is the Voice of the Blind<sup>™</sup> in Canada, a membership-based charity that brings together Canadians who are living with vision loss, the blind, deaf-blind and the partially sighted. Advocating for its members, the CCB works to promote a sense of purpose and self-esteem along with an enhanced quality of life. Based on belief in ABILITY, not disability, CCB is a vibrant network of active members across Canada. Each chapter is unique to its geographic area and engages in a variety of social and recreational activities based on the interests of their local members.

Visit <https://www.ccbnational.net> or call 1-877-304-0968 for more information.

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## References

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5. Canadian Council of the Blind. Addendum to the Cost of Vision Loss and Blindness in Canada: The Impact of COVID-19. Available at: <https://www.fightingblindness.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Deloitte-COVID-Addendum-Acc-10-13-21.pdf>. Accessed on October 13, 2021.

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2. [https://www.fightingblindness.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CCB\\_Cost-of-VI-in-Canada\\_Final-Report\\_04052021.pdf](https://www.fightingblindness.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CCB_Cost-of-VI-in-Canada_Final-Report_04052021.pdf)
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