



World Blind Union
Union Mondiale Des Aveugles
Unión Mundial de Ciegos

Universal Eye Health Matters

WBU Press Release for World Sight Day – October 13th, 2016

Toronto, Canada: Every year, on the second Thursday in October, we celebrate World Sight Day to increase awareness of the global issue of avoidable blindness and vision loss. This year's theme is Universal Eye Health, and it is a rolling theme, to be used over the next few years as it links to the World Health Organization's (WHO) [Universal Eye Health: A Global Action Plan 2014-2019](#). The vision of the Global Action Plan is "a world in which nobody is needlessly visually impaired, where those with unavoidable vision loss can achieve their full potential and where there is universal access to comprehensive eye care services." The Plan builds upon [VISION 2020: The Right to Sight](#), a global initiative to eliminate avoidable blindness, which is a programme of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB).

The WBU shares in this vision of a world where no one is needlessly blind and where every blind and partially sighted person can achieve their full potential. There have been many successes in the field of eye health over the past several decades, including the success of the Onchocerciasis (also known as river blindness) Control Programme and the resulting decrease in the prevalence of river blindness (link: [IAPB](#), 2016) as well as improvements in cataract surgeries and their inclusion in most national plans for preventing blindness (link: [IAPB](#), 2016). However, much more still needs to be done in order to end preventable blindness. An estimated eighty percent of visual impairment could have been prevented, especially in developing countries, where ninety percent of the total global visual impairment occurs (link: [WHO](#), 2014).

It is also important to use World Sight Day to focus on the issues that affect persons who are blind and partially sighted. Blind people face barriers and discrimination daily and they often result in multiple forms

1929 Bayview Avenue, Toronto, ON Canada M4G 3E8

T: 1-416-486-9698 F: 1-416-486-8107

Email: info@wbu.ngo Website: www.wbu.ngo

[f facebook.com/BlindUnion](https://www.facebook.com/BlindUnion) [t twitter.com/BlindUnion](https://twitter.com/BlindUnion)

of discrimination, due to compounding factors, such as gender, race and multiple disabilities and/or disorders.

For example, it is estimated that seventy percent of people that are fully blind suffer from a disorder known as Non-24, defined as “a chronic, circadian rhythm disorder resulting from the misalignment of the... master body clock to the 24-hour day, disrupting the sleep-wake cycle” (link: [VANDA Pharmaceuticals](#), 2016). Non-24 can cause many people to have trouble falling asleep at night and trouble staying awake during the day, which can cause major issues for children at school and for adults at work. This disorder carries with it a lot of stigma and can cause discrimination at school, in the workplace and even at home, since the disorder is not well-known, and many people may think the person is simply lazy and therefore unsuitable as an employee or student. Even though Non-24 is so prevalent in the blind community, there is still little awareness about it, which does not help decrease the stigma that people with Non-24 often face.

In general, many health complications that can cause vision loss or result from vision loss are not well known. To help deal with this lack of awareness, we are launching a new health page on our website, titled **Vision Health Matters** to offer resources for both the general public as well as blind and partially sighted persons themselves to learn more about different eye health issues as well as links to treatment and prevention solutions. It will be available on our website by November.

The World Blind Union (WBU) is the global organization that represents the estimated 285 million people worldwide who are blind or partially sighted. Members consist of organizations of blind people advocating on their own behalf and organizations that serve the blind, in over 190 countries, as well as international organizations working in the field of vision impairment. Visit our website at www.wbu.ngo

For further information, please contact:
Caitlin Reid, Communications Officer, World Blind Union
Caitlin.Reid@wbu.ngo