



VISION IMPACT INSTITUTE™

Advocate Public Policies for Better Vision

450M Myopic in China, Newly Released by China National Vision Health White Paper

Beijing – June 5, 2016 – On the eve of China's National Sight Day (June 6), the China National Vision Health Symposium took place at the National School of Development at Peking University in Beijing. Participants included government officials from the National Health and Family Planning Committee (NHFPC), Ministry of Education (MOE) and General Administration of Sports of China (GAS); Professor Li Ling, Head of China Center for Health Development (CCHD), Peking University; Kristan Gross, Director of Global Content and Communication from the Vision Impact Institute (VII); Patrick Cherrier, Senior Adviser to Chairman and CEO of Essilor Group; and He Yi, President of Essilor China. The state of China's optical industry, as described in Prof. Li's highly regarded National Vision Care Report, was the primary focus of the symposium. Participants agreed that while it is crucial to improve the awareness of vision health in China, there is also a need to promote the relevant public policies in place.

The Need for Additional Research

"Today, approximately 4.5 billion people – 63 percent of the total world population – are in need of vision correction globally, among which 2.5 billion people remain uncorrected," said Gross. Poor vision is a critical public health and social issue and can lead to insufficient schooling, poverty, road accidents, distress and social exclusion for those affected. Despite efforts made by international organizations including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the continued advocacy for relevant policymaking, few country-specific reports have been created on vision health.

As the first domestic white paper on vision health, Prof. Li's report provides a comprehensive outlook on the Chinese population's visual health from an economic, public policy and medical perspective. The paper also summarizes relevant policies in China and other countries while outlining a long-term plan that includes theoretical analysis and reliable data support for domestic and foreign researchers in the areas of vision health.

Alarming Impacts of Visual Defects

Leader of the China National Vision Health Project, Prof. Li stated, “China is experiencing an unparalleled visual health crisis. On one hand, the number of youths with myopia in China is high, which can threaten the vision health of present and future generations and potentially negatively impact society, the economy and security of the country. On the other hand, patients are experiencing age-related visual defects at a much younger age, which can be a heavy burden to a society that is seeing significant growth in its elderly population.”

According to Prof. Li’s National Vision Care Report, in 2012 nearly 500 million people over the age of five had a visual defect in China, among which about 450 million had myopia. By 2020, nearly 700 million people are expected to have myopia in China – twice the population of the United States.

But vision problems among the elderly can’t be ignored. Gross pointed out that “Of those 65 and older, about 50 percent suffer from severe vision defects. In China specifically, approximately 67.85 percent of presbyopia patients – age 40 and older – could receive correction. However, with the rapidly aging population, severe problems caused by poor vision will significantly reduce a person’s quality of life.” Mr. Xi Jinping, President of China, recently stated that the growth of China’s elderly population directly impacts the nation’s overall development. Therefore, common health problems among the elderly such as presbyopia can be more significant.

The Chinese population’s continuously deteriorating vision health will not only lead to higher medical costs and social security risk, but also a reduction in labor participation and life quality loss. In 2012, the social and economic costs caused by visual defects amounted to RMB 680 billion, accounting for about 1.3 percent of China’s GDP. Costs caused by damaged quality of life due to poor vision health amounted to RMB 952 billion, accounting for about 1.83 percent of China’s GDP. If provided with proper correction, a total labor participation loss of RMB 310 billion can be reduced, amounting to 0.7 percent of China’s GDP in 2012.

Support for Public Policy

In recent years, the spectrum of visual diseases in China has greatly changed. Ametropia and presbyopia have become major threats to vision health. However, public education, disease prevention, medical care and security policies, and regulations on lens products can hardly satisfy citizens' demands on vision health. It is urgent to adjust the fragmented policies related to China’s vision care.

Based on the principle of "integrating health into the policy", Prof. Li suggests that the government establish a vision health public policy system consisting of four aspects:

- **Decision-making** – a national vision health decision-making mechanism should be created to answer four questions: who should be in charge of vision health, what concrete actions should be carried out, who should receive vision health services, and how can polices be verified.
- **Planning** – with the goal of everyone having good visual health, the importance of prevention and treatment should be emphasized.
- **Operating** – vision healthcare services should be integrated into overall healthcare services as part of the medical reform, ultimately leading to the implementation of new policies.
- **Implementing** – an incentive mechanism and clear timeline should be established, and trainings and related research should be enhanced.

Officials from the NHPC agree that optician services should be standardized as a public health service. Currently, the public perceives the lens industry to be quite lucrative, and therefore believes eye care services should be free. These misunderstandings are a result of insufficient industry standards. Representatives of the lens industry have urged the government to issue both production and service standards as a key solution to the vision health crisis in China.

According to Prof. Li's National Vision Care Report, the government must regulate the lens industry by establishing a credible body of regulators to set standards for both vision care companies and professionals, and specifying requirements for market entry. In addition, a localized three "O" (ophthalmologists, optometrists and opticians) talent pool should be formed with a compensation system based on medical insurance, taxation and price leveraging, in order to promote healthy and sustainable development of the industry.

About the Vision Impact Institute

The Vision Impact Institute's mission is to raise awareness of the importance of healthy vision, including the socio economic impact of Uncorrected Refractive Errors (URE) and quality of life benefits of visual correction. Its Advisory Board is comprised of five independent international experts: Pr. Kevin Frick (United States), Pr. Clare Gilbert (United Kingdom), Pr. Kavin Naidoo (South Africa), Mr. Arun Bharat Ram (India) and Mr. Wu Jianmin (China).

The Vision Impact Institute is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, which receives support from the Vision for Life Fund from Essilor, the world leader in ophthalmic optics. The Vision Impact Institute hosts an interactive web platform, a unique data base of research, available at visionimpactinstitute.org.

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