

DINE IN THE DARK UN CONCEPT NOTE

BACKGROUND: As visual impairments become more prevalent with advancing age, access to health care is critical to the continued integration of older persons in society, as well as to realizing their right to the highest attainable standard of health. The impact of vision on quality of life, healthy and active ageing, and fiscal sustainability can be measured far beyond the immediacy of vision itself. Consequences ranging from falls, cognitive decline, dependency, and mental health are as significant on quality of life as exponential increases in health and medical costs, growing need for care provision and hospitalization. More than 80% of those with vision loss or severe visual impairment around the world are over the age of 50.¹ The global burden of vision loss is expected to skyrocket as older persons reach 8.5 billion by 2030.² Yet, the majority of vision loss – even in older adults – is preventable.³ Too often, ageist assumptions persist that declining vision is just a normal part of the ageing process. In reality, vision loss is under-diagnosed, under-treated, and under-funded. It is estimated that 2.5 billion people with vision problems do not address them, due to multiple barriers such as accessibility, affordability, lack of information and age discrimination. As we work towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good health and well-being) and prepare for the WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing (2020-2030) and countries worldwide affirm their commitments to Universal Health Coverage, we have an important opportunity to elevate avoidable vision loss to the highest priority level on the global health and national policy agendas.

CONCEPT: Dine in the Dark is an awareness-raising event during which guests participate in a sit-down meal while blindfolded to simulate the everyday experiences of those with vision loss. Inspired by the successful Dine in the Dark at the European Parliament in late 2018, GCOA, the National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI), and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) will bring this unforgettable event to the United Nations to highlight the urgent need for countries to prioritize action on eye health.

OBJECTIVES: The objective of the Dine in the Dark event is to raise awareness about avoidable vision loss among ambassadors and high-level decisionmakers in UN member states. The cross-sector partnership among GCOA, NCBI, and DESA is a unique opportunity to raise awareness about the specific challenges faced by older adults as their vision deteriorates and the growing magnitude, impact, and urgency of vision loss in our rapidly ageing world. The event will unite policy makers, policy influencers, and other key stakeholders from the public, private, and NGO sectors around a shared priority to reduce the burden of avoidable vision loss. The event is a further opportunity to build consensus and motivate concrete action aligned with the recommendations in the recently released GCOA white paper, “A Life Course of Healthy Vision: A Critical Priority for the 21st Century,” and the forthcoming World Health Organization world report on vision, expected to be released in Fall 2019.

¹ World Health Organization, “Blindness and vision impairment,” (2017).
<http://www.portal.pmnch.org/mediacentre/factsheets/fs282/en/>

² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. *World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision. Highlights* https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf

³ World Health Organization, “Blindness and vision impairment,” (2017).
<http://www.portal.pmnch.org/mediacentre/factsheets/fs282/en/>