

# VISION 2020:

## — Living with Vision Loss —

**Do you suspect you have low vision?**

Learn more about rehabilitation with the Opticians Association on **page 3.**

### Event News

Attend all three events at: The Great Hall, Christ Church Cathedral, 414 Sparks Street, Ottawa, ON  
Call 1-613-567-0311 or 1-877-304-0968 (toll-free) to register by phone.

#### Vision Quest Tea and Talk

Feb. 11, 2020  
2 p.m. to 4 p.m.  
Register at [fightingblindness.ca/ottawa-vision-quest](http://fightingblindness.ca/ottawa-vision-quest)

#### Canadian Vision 2020 Summit

Feb. 12, 2020  
8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.  
Register at [fightingblindness.ca/2020-summit](http://fightingblindness.ca/2020-summit)

#### Vision 2020 Gala Dinner

Feb. 12, 2020  
5:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.  
Ticket information available by email at [ccb@ccbnational.net](mailto:ccb@ccbnational.net)

## Opening Our Eyes to Vision Loss in 2020

A visual acuity measurement of 20/20 is a standard associated with “normal” vision. But many Canadians live with vision that isn’t represented by this norm. In fact, over two million live with a seeing disability, a number that’s in the process of doubling over the next two decades. This could lead to additional health care costs of over \$30 billion per year.

The year 2020 is symbolic for this growing community. It’s a reminder that vision loss is far-reaching in this country, and that more must be done to comprehend the personal and social consequences. Those with unimpaired sight can close their eyes and imagine what blindness entails, but vision loss is diverse and highly personal, affecting families, communities, and economies in complex ways — simply

closing your eyes doesn’t get you there.

For instance, those who are fully-sighted may not know that Canadians with vision loss face a range of stereotypes and biases. These manifest most clearly in our job market, which leaves too many with vision loss either under-employed or unemployed. Accessibility is a key concern in this area. There’s broad consensus that Canada needs to incorporate accessible and assistive technologies into its workplaces, and that employers should be rewarded for embracing those with visual impairments.

At the same time, many Canadians with low sight keep the details of their vision to themselves — they’re worried that transparency will lead to discrimination. Although the Genetic Non-Discrimination Act makes it illegal

for companies to request genetic testing or deny services based on genetic information, additional protections are required for all of Canada’s vision loss community. This is especially the case in the areas of employment, insurance, and health care.

The general population may also be unaware of the impact that vision loss has on family members, who in many cases bear the largest burden of support. This can lead to financial strain and lost productivity. As work becomes increasingly precarious and social supports continue to disappear, there’s a danger that caregivers will become overwhelmed. In 2020, creating support mechanisms for our support providers has never been more important.

To open our eyes to these and other issues, a summit is being held on February

12 in Ottawa by five of the country’s leading vision groups: the Canadian Council of the Blind, Fighting Blindness Canada, and its partners the CNIB, the Canadian Association of Optometrists, and the Canadian Ophthalmological Society. The Canadian Vision 2020 Summit will cover topics across three categories — vision loss, research, and access — and bring together patients, caregivers, scientists, researchers, policymakers, and more. >

*Chad Andrews*

Draft white papers on the summit’s topics have been made public at [fightingblindness.ca/2020-summit](http://fightingblindness.ca/2020-summit). Please visit the page to provide your input and learn more about the event.



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# An Open Letter from the Canadian Council of the Blind and Fighting Blindness Canada

Welcome!

On behalf of the Canadian Council of the Blind and Fighting Blindness Canada, we'd like to thank you for reading *Vision 2020: Living with Vision Loss*.

We're living at an exciting moment in history. Research is beginning to deliver treatments for the over 5.6 million Canadians living with an eye condition that puts them at risk of losing their sight. If diagnosed early enough, three out of four can avoid blindness. It's also a time when innovative new treatments that not only prevent vision loss but also restore sight are becoming a reality.

These developments hold important implications for our vision loss community. We need to be prepared for them — we need to support Canadian researchers and vision scientists in developing Canadian-made solutions to vision loss, while also ensuring that Canada's health care system is prepared to meet the radical shift posed by the arrival of innovative treatments such as gene and stem cell therapies.

We also need to develop tangible solutions to the unique financial and social inequities faced by the vision loss community. We need to present a unified front to federal and provincial decision-makers by offering solutions to the mounting costs associated with vision health care. This is particularly important as the number of people living with vision loss, which stands at 1.5 million Canadians reporting a vision impairment, continues to grow. Most importantly, we need to continue to impress on all Canadians that they get regular eye examinations and that some vision loss is avoidable.

That's why on February 12, we're hosting the Canadian Vision 2020 Summit in Ottawa. We invite you to join our distinguished panellists in conversations about vision research, living with vision loss, and access to vision health care. As a valued member of our community, your perspective is essential in developing solutions to the challenges we all face.

Thank you for reading. Together, we can find ways to avoid vision loss and restore sight to those who have lost it.

Sincerely,



**Louise Gillis**  
National President,  
Canadian Council of the Blind



**Doug Earle**  
President & CEO,  
Fighting Blindness Canada

*Louise Gillis*

*Doug Earle*

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CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS  
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES OPTOMÉTRISTES

## Your Eyes: The Line of Sight on Your Life

When we conjure up the fondest memories of our lives, and also when we make new ones, we use all our senses. Whether it's a loved one's face or a favourite film, images are what stay with us forever and make us who we are. But as we age, it's less certain that our vision itself will stick around.

The single greatest cause of vision loss in Canadians over 50 is age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a condition where the macula — the central part of the retina responsible for our central vision — degrades over time. The retina is the film that records the movie of our life, and when the film is damaged, the movie suffers.

AMD affects more than a million Canadians, so when leading vision organizations teamed up to raise awareness, it

made sense that the first avenue selected to reach a wide audience was the 2019 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). The main message the Canadian Council of the Blind, Fighting Blindness Canada, the Canadian Retina Society, and Novartis Canada hoped would be remembered is that *memories stay with you, so should your vision. Spot the symptoms of AMD.*

### Early intervention can offer huge benefits

AMD comes in both dry and wet forms, with wet AMD being rarer and generally much more severe. The defining characteristic of wet AMD is abnormal blood vessels growing under the retina, which can break, leak, and bleed, causing serious damage. Dry AMD occurs when the macula becomes thinner and,

as a result, less capable of supporting the retina's photoreceptors, the cells that convert light into visual signals. Vision loss occurs as these cells die off. "People with dry AMD usually maintain pretty good vision," says retina specialist and Chief of Ophthalmology Dr. Peter Kertes of Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. "The rule of thumb is that, while the significant majority of AMD is the dry form, the majority of severe vision loss occurs with wet AMD."

The good news for wet AMD patients is that the outcome can be quite good if the disease is caught early. "There continues to be enormous progress in treating wet AMD. With many patients, the right intervention not only stops their vision from worsening, but actually helps them to regain some of the vision they had lost," says Dr. Kertes.

### Vigilance is key to protecting eyesight

"Awareness and vigilance are so important," says Dr. Kertes. "Every patient is different, and some do better than others, but it's definitely the case that the earlier you catch wet AMD, the better."

For this reason, it's essential that all Canadians over the age of 50 be vigilant and know the early warning signs to look out for. "People should be aware of the symptoms that need immediate attention," says Dr. Kertes. "Fortunately, the onset of wet AMD usually isn't very subtle. The most common symptoms are blurred or blind spots in the central visual field as well as distortion, meaning that straight lines don't look straight anymore. If there's any significant change in your vision, it

warrants attention from an eye doctor sooner rather than later."

If you're over 50, the important takeaway is to not take your vision for granted in the face of AMD. Good vision is essential as we age for maintaining independence, and for social and cultural engagement through mediums like literature and film. And it's exactly these things —

*"It's essential that all Canadians over the age of 50 be vigilant and know the early warning signs to look out for."*

independence and engagement — that allow us to age healthily and gracefully. So, next time you're taking in a film or appreciating a beautiful sight, remind yourself just how valuable your vision is, and make sure you're taking the right steps to safeguard it. 👁️

D.F. McCourt



Dr. Peter Kertes, retina specialist and Chief of Ophthalmology, at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre and Louise Gillis of the Canadian Council of the Blind on the TIFF red carpet.

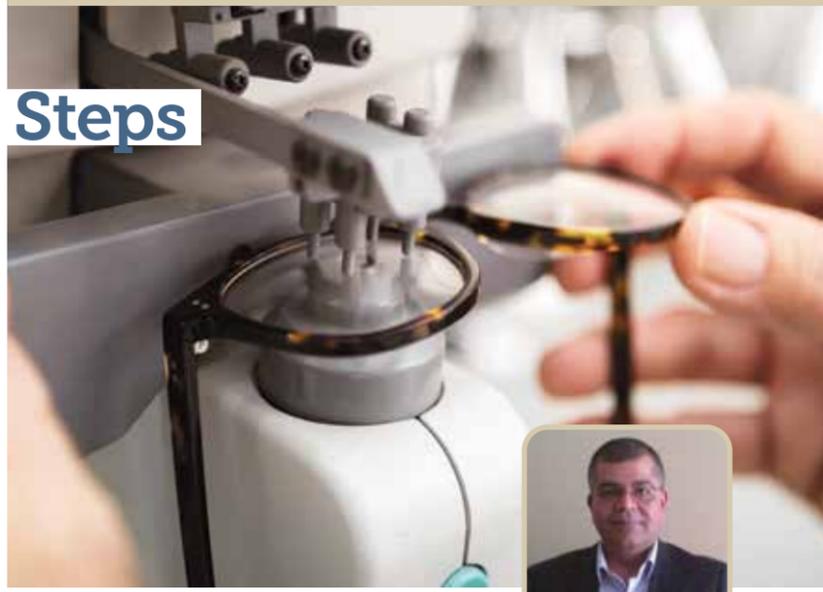
# Vision Impairment and Steps to Your Rehabilitation

**W**hat is low vision? Low vision is significant vision loss that can't be corrected with conventional eyeglasses, contact lenses, or surgical procedures. It can be caused by an eye disease, genetics, or an injury to the eye.

If someone suspects they have low vision, they'll typically engage the services of an eye health care professional. Thus begins the rehabilitation. The process is a multidisciplinary one that may involve various professionals, including opticians, optometrists, ophthalmologists, low vision specialists, orientation and mobility specialists, and daily living specialists. An eye exam is always recommended as the first step. Updating a patient's eyeglasses prescription helps in obtaining low-vision devices with a minimum level of magnification to increase the patient's field of view.

The second step in the process is a low vision assessment. This helps to determine the appropriate device(s) needed. The low vision assessment can be done by an optician, optometrist, or ophthalmologist, or by a low vision specialist from the CNIB. All these services can usually be found in the same clinic/dispensary.

The low vision assessment determines how to best enhance the patient's limited vision. Once the right devices are found, patients are taught how to use and care for these devices. Devices may include hand, stand, and electronic magnifiers, telescopes, and non-optical aids such as filters. Other non-optical aids, such as additional lighting, can be looked into to see whether they'd be helpful in increasing contrast or decreasing glare. Depending on the type and the stage of the impairment, the patient may be referred to other professionals to help with daily living.



**Zully Kasmani**  
Registered Optician,  
Secretary-Treasurer,  
Ontario Opticians Association

Eye care professionals recommend starting low vision rehabilitation when vision loss is at an earlier rather than a later stage, as it's easier for an individual to adapt to the low-vision devices before there's considerable vision impairment. If you have vision loss, talk to your optician today. 👁️

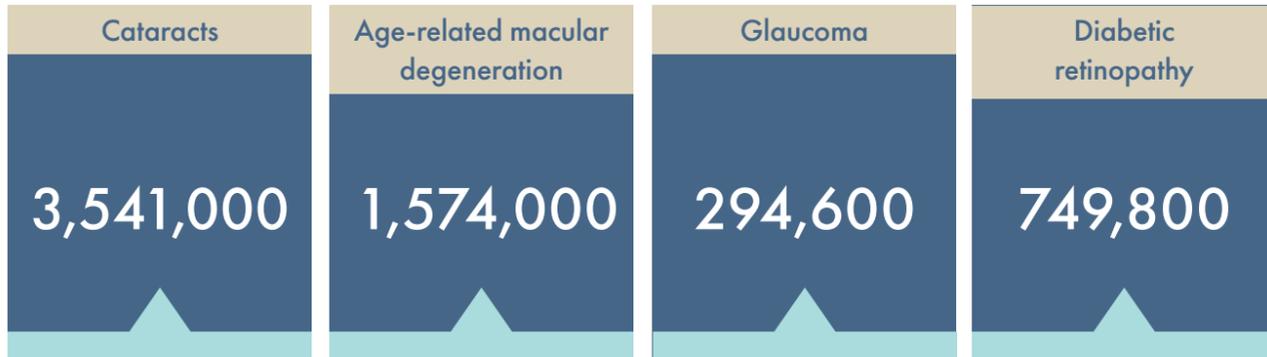
Zully Kasmani

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## Vision Impairment in Canada

The approximate numbers of individuals with various types of vision impairment in Canada are:



## The Vision Is Clear for a Better Tomorrow

**F**or more than 250 million people around the world, blindness and vision impairment are a reality. Nearly 90 percent of those with a visual impairment live in developing countries, with limited access to vision care.

Blindness and poor vision can keep people trapped in vicious cycles of poverty. Vision loss limits childhood education and minimizes adult productivity, directly affecting individuals, families, and entire communities.

Incredibly, 80 percent of all vision impairment can be cured or prevented, and over a third of treatable blindness is caused by cataracts that are easily fixed. Since 1982, Seva Canada has transformed the lives of over five million people in

communities with little or no access to eye care by restoring their sight. The organization focuses on increasing the capacity of local hospitals, supporting local training initiatives, and developing sustainable eye care programs that provide care now, and in the future.

### A powerful ripple effect

"Restoring eyesight and preventing vision impairment has a ripple effect," says Penny Lyons, Executive Director of Seva Canada. "People are able to better take care of their health, contribute to their communities, and lift their families out of poverty."

This is especially true for women, who represent over half of the people living



with vision impairment and blindness in developing countries. For Lin Seouth, her increasing vision loss made everyday tasks like cooking for her family harder and harder, and she soon became unable to care for them or fend for herself. A simple life-changing cataract surgery facilitated by Seva was all it took to restore Seouth's vision. The excitement and gratitude from Seouth and her family were remarkable.

### The case for gender equity

Social, economic, and cultural barriers often prevent visually-impaired women and girls in developing countries from getting the care they need. An astonishing two thirds of all children who are blind are girls, a fact that clearly points to the underlying obstacles and inequity at play.

"Lack of access to eye care services is strongly associated with lack of socioeconomic status, lack of education and financial resources, and limited decision-making power," says Lyons. "Young girls are even more at risk since they're children and can't advocate for themselves. Yet we know that for every additional year a girl stays in school, her income will rise by 10 to 20 percent."

Seva Canada will continue to work hard, with the support of Canadians, to ensure that everyone, including women,

children, and people living in extreme poverty and isolation, has an equal right to sight.

By providing its local partners with everything from training to supplies and funding surgeries, glasses, and medicine, Seva Canada's eye care programs are high-quality, self-sufficient, and self-sustaining in terms of both human and financial resources. However, to achieve its vision of a world in which no one is needlessly blind or visually-impaired, there's much work that needs to be done to provide eye care to meet the growing and aging population's needs. 👁️

Melissa Vekil

To learn more about how Seva Canada is transforming lives by restoring eyesight or to make a donation, visit [seva.ca](http://seva.ca).

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# Paving the Way for Greater Tech Accessibility

Mediaplanet spoke with Kataryna Patsak, an Accessibility Project Manager with Bell, about why accessibility should be embraced and Bell's innovative products and services that work to break down barriers.



**Kataryna Patsak**  
Accessibility Project Manager,  
Mobility Products & Services,  
Bell

## Mediaplanet What does accessibility mean?

**Kataryna Patsak** For me, accessibility means working with the accessibility community to help build a barrier-free society in which everyone can participate and contribute. Fundamentally, accessibility means that those with accessibility needs have the right to have the same level and quality of services as everyone else and that they shouldn't have to face any undue hardship to receive them. It also means that where barriers do exist, they must be removed, reduced, or altered to allow people with disabilities to access the same physical locations, products, services, and opportunities as everyone else.

## MP Why is accessibility something companies need to be aware of, and should embrace?

**KP** There are many reasons for companies to be aware of and embrace accessibility. Accessibility in customer service, user experience, and user design creates an excellent experience for everyone by making spaces, services, and products more accessible for all customers. Additionally, the number of Canadians with accessibility needs is growing, which means that this is an important segment of the population that companies can reach. Lastly, in my experience, customers who have different accessibility needs appreciate and are extremely loyal to companies that strive to provide them with services, products, and an experience that are truly accessible for them.



## MP Why is accessibility important to Bell?

**KP** In terms of accessibility, Bell believes that the benefits of advanced communications technology should be easily accessible by everyone. Through our Accessibility Services Centre, which offers specialty products and services designed with accessibility in mind, Bell is helping to break down barriers that limit access. The Accessibility Services Centre also has dedicated agents to serve customers with accessibility needs. As a result, more Canadians are able to have access to Canada's best national network.

## MP How does technology play a role in eliminating barriers for people with low vision or blindness?

**KP** One of the main roles that technology plays in eliminating barriers for people with low vision or blindness is that it allows users to lead their lives independently and to contribute their skills, talents, and personalities to their communities. Mobile devices often now have great accessibility features for blind and low-vision users and can be compatible with accessories such as braille keyboards, AfterShokz Trekz headphones, and Google Home. GPS apps such as BlindSquare Promo, which is available at a low price of \$9.99 for Bell customers, allow users to have a more independent travel experience.

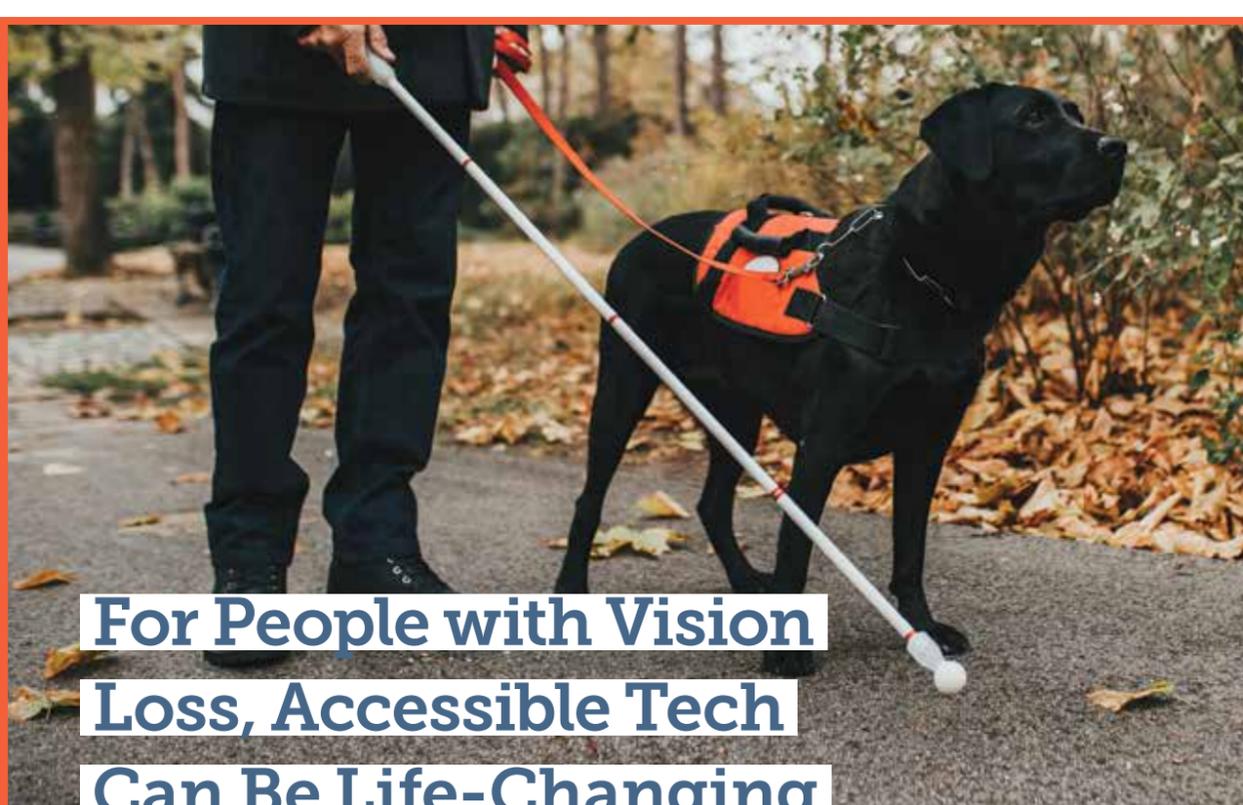
## MP What accessibility products and services does Bell Mobility offer?

**KP** Bell is very proud of the services, products, and support offered to accessibility customers, including:

- A dedicated Accessibility Services Centre
- A \$20 credit per month on eligible rate plans, found on [bell.ca](https://bell.ca)
- Access to the best national network in Canada
- The incredible price of \$9.99 for the BlindSquare Promo App exclusively for Bell customers
- Bill credits on Doro devices
- Directory assistance
- Alternate bill formats such as e-text, audio, braille, and large print
- A mobile accessible app for Android users
- Bell Mobility customers can get the new tecla-e for the exclusive price of \$263

## MP Where can consumers go to learn more about accessibility?

**KP** For more information on accessible products and services, visit [bell.ca/accessibility](https://bell.ca/accessibility) or call the Accessibility Services Centre at 1-800-694-9313.



## For People with Vision Loss, Accessible Tech Can Be Life-Changing

People with vision loss can face barriers and challenges in accessing media, employment opportunities, independent transportation, and more. Technology is changing that. In developing accessible technology and offering advanced training tools, companies like Bell and programs like Get Together with Technology are actively trying to help level the playing field.

### The power of peer mentoring

Get Together with Technology (GTT) is a Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB) initiative that empowers members of the Canadian blind, deaf-blind, and low-vision communities by offering peer support and training on assistive tools, strategies, and technology. Its coaching by and for people with low vision helps participants gain competence and confidence in the use of accessible technologies.

Nowadays, technology can aid in many aspects of daily life: mobility and transportation, health and fitness, work, education, and more. From being able to read the news and identify household items to being able to get around with ease, technology can be life-changing for people with vision loss.

"Technology has changed enormously over the last 10 to 15 years," says Kim Kilpatrick, GTT Co-Founder and Program Coordinator. "There's so much we can do now that we couldn't before."

### Increasing accessibility

Kilpatrick, who also works as an accessibility consultant, met with Bell — a company known to offer innovative and inclusive accessibility services and products, such as its dedicated Accessibility Services Centre — to discuss which products and services GTT participants found most helpful. One of Kilpatrick's recommendations was BlindSquare

Promo, an accessible GPS app. "If I'm in an unfamiliar area, it can tell me what street I'm crossing or what streets we're going by on the bus," she says.

Another was an innovative set of headphones called AfterShokz Trekz, which allow users to hear directions from their phone while also being able to hear what's going on around them. The headphones sit on the jaw, in front of one's ears rather than over them, transmitting sound through the jaw bone into the inner ear. "It's a weird feeling — like voices in your head," says Kilpatrick.

Both products facilitate safer, more reliable mobility and opens the doors to enhanced independence.

Based on Kilpatrick's feedback, Bell developed a specialized program to make these products more readily available to low-vision users. It worked with the BlindSquare Promo developer to get the app's price subsidized for Bell users, and it offered the AfterShokz headphones as part of a gift-with-purchase program with one of its accessibility devices.

With programs like GTT and providers like Bell, getting on the tech train is becoming easier than ever. More independent daily living awaits.

Tania Amardeil



**Kim Kilpatrick**  
Co-Founder &  
Program Coordinator,  
Get Together with Technology  
(GTT)

"If I'm in an unfamiliar area, it can tell me what street I'm crossing or what streets we're going by on the bus."

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At Vision Quest in the fall of 2018, the panel focused on the Patient Registry, which is a secure medical database for patients living with inherited retinal diseases. From left to right: Clinician-scientists Dr. Ian MacDonald, Vaishnavi Batmanabane, Dr. Johane Robitaille, and Dr. Elise Héon.

## Vision Quest 2020: Connecting You to Breakthroughs in Vision Research

At Fighting Blindness Canada (FBC), we're motivated by a singular goal: to develop new treatments for blindness and vision loss. This goal fuels all of the research we fund and everything that we do. Our educational programming provides exciting updates on vision research to patients and their families from coast

to coast. Every year, we strive to share the latest breakthroughs in vision science directly with our supporters through our Vision Quest educational programming. In 2020, Vision Quest will visit communities across Canada in a variety of formats, including Tea and Talks, evening speaker series, and Saturday Symposiums. The first Vision

Quest of the year will be a Tea and Talk about age-related vision loss in Ottawa on February 11.

For more information on this and other Vision Quest events, visit [fightingblindness.ca/get-involved/vision-quest](https://fightingblindness.ca/get-involved/vision-quest).

## Research Delivers Sight-Restoring Treatment

It's fitting that as we enter 2020, the year of vision, we're seeing science theory turn into life-changing treatments for people with vision loss. We're seeing the promise of personalized medicine become a reality with lab discoveries reaching clinical trials for treatments in stem cell and gene therapy.

Gene therapy is a new kind of treatment that works by delivering a functioning copy of a gene directly into the eye. This newly-introduced, functioning gene acts as a treatment by replacing a gene that's not working properly. After just a single treatment, gene therapy has the potential to restore sight, providing lifelong benefits.

The first targeted gene therapy was approved by the U.S. and European health authorities in 2018. It sets the precedent for the innovative new therapies on the way. It restores partial sight for individuals who have Leber congenital amaurosis (LCA) caused by mutations in the RPE65 gene.

### From innovation to patient care

Jack McCormick was born with LCA and mutations in the RPE65 gene. He always had poor vision, but his condition worsened in his teens and he now uses a guide dog. He can see light and some shadows but can't see a person's face, even in good light. In poor light, he sees almost nothing.

"I'm so excited that research has delivered a potential treatment to restore my sight. I'm so hopeful that I may be able to see again, with the life skills of perseverance and determination that I learned growing up while losing my sight," he says.

When this gene therapy treatment is submitted for approval in Canada, it will also be the test case for future gene therapies and personalized drugs. It's clear that not only do we have to continue to support the research, from basic science through clinical trials, that have made this treatment a reality, but we have to ensure that Canadians have access to it — access that is equal, timely, and affordable. We know that

science takes not years but decades to move an idea through to treatment. Our investments are starting to pay off and it's vital that we work together to ensure that the hope and the cure can be a reality for Canadians.

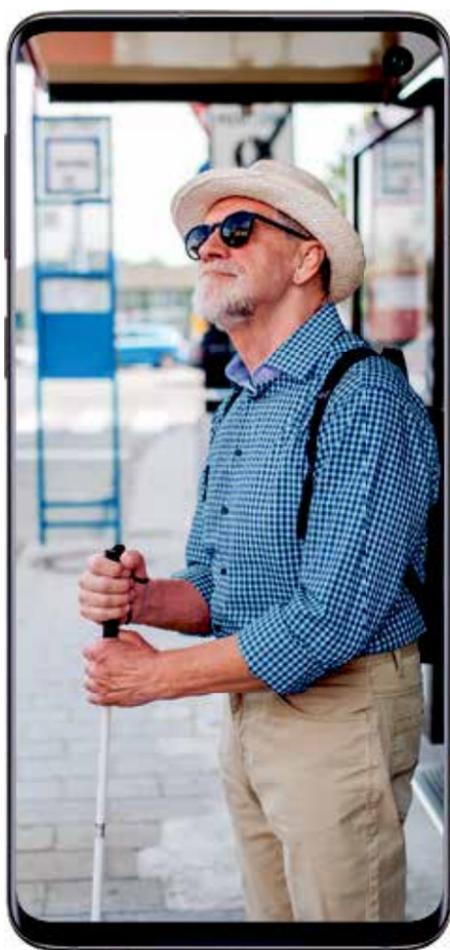
Larissa Moniz

For more information, visit [fightingblindness.ca/research](https://fightingblindness.ca/research).

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## GPS apps for vision accessibility needs



BlindSquare Promo and Nearby Explorer Online provide for safe, reliable and independent travel by voicing directions, points of interest and descriptions of surrounding areas, both indoors and outdoors. Take advantage of these apps anywhere you go on Canada's largest network.<sup>1</sup>



Nearby Explorer Online

\$0 Available for Apple and Android devices.

Exclusive price for Bell customers:



BlindSquare Promo

\$9.99<sup>2</sup> (reg. \$54.99) Available for Apple devices.

[bell.ca/accessibility](https://bell.ca/accessibility) • 1 800 268-9243

**Bell** getting around just got better

## Molly Burke Tackles Vision Loss and Accessibility

Mediaplanet sat down with motivational speaker and blind advocate Molly Burke to learn about her experience living with retinitis pigmentosa and the future of accessibility.

**Mediaplanet** At age four, you were diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa (RP), a disease causing loss of vision. What challenges did this diagnosis present you with?

**Molly Burke** The obvious challenges exist with blindness — not being able to drive, read, and so on, but to me, it's some of the small challenges that can be the most frustrating. Trying to find the soap dispenser in a public washroom, trying to pay with a debit card at a touchscreen machine... it's all those little daily tasks that can become frustrating at times.

**MP** What encouraged you to become a motivational speaker and advocate for the blind and low-vision community?

**MB** I began public speaking at the age of five, about a year after my RP diagnosis. The moment I set foot on stage for the first time, I fell in love and I begged my parents for more. I asked to be put in acting classes and told my parents I was going to move to

Hollywood and be an actress. Performing onstage has always been my passion. It's where I feel more comfortable, more myself, and most alive. It felt only fitting that I use my passion for stage performance to share my story and help others.

**MP** You've become a successful content creator. Do you face accessibility issues online and through social platforms today?

**MB** Not all websites are accessible to screen readers, like I use. I continue to face issues of inaccessibility on different social platforms and apps, and require assistance with some things. I always try to raise awareness of these issues when they arise and hope to encourage more companies to think about accessibility in their designs.

**MP** As a content creator, what would you say are the most important elements to consider to guarantee your content is accessible?

**MB** Platforms like YouTube currently don't have an option for audio description, which I've discussed with them and would love to see change in the future. Due to that, I try my best to be as verbally descriptive as I can when filming, although even I myself can miss things sometimes. No one is perfect, but I try my best to enable captions for the deaf and hard of hearing community and to be as inclusive with my language as possible.

**MP** How is technology redefining accessibility?

**MB** Technology can either be empowering or disabling for my community. When companies think about universal and inclusive design when creating their products, it can open so many doors for blind and low-vision users. It's when they forget about us as a consumer and customer base and don't design accessible products that we really take a step back.

**MP** What can Canadians do to create a more accessible and inclusive world?

**MB** Everyone can play a role in making the world more accessible. It starts with knowledge and empathy. I think all Canadians can make more of an effort to

educate themselves and become more involved with the disability community around them.

**MP** What advice do you have for other Canadians experiencing vision loss?

**MB** Get involved in the vision loss community — go to your local CNIB, join blind-friendly sports teams, find support groups (there are plenty on Facebook) — just get involved and don't be afraid of this community. The blind community is an incredible place and has amazing people to learn from and share with. 



## AMI Working to Make Media Content More Inclusive

By creating content for the blind and partially-sighted community, Accessible Media Inc. (AMI) hopes to become a global leader in media accessibility.

Although we live in a media-driven culture, a lot of media content and platforms continue to be inaccessible to the blind and partially-sighted community. With vision loss being such an isolating condition, it's vital that people in this community are included in the media.

AMI, a not-for-profit media company serving the blind and partially-sighted community in Canada, is bridging the media accessibility gap by producing content for them. "By doing that, we're able to inform this community

about opportunities, organizations, and groups they can connect with to feel more included," says Peter Burke, Vice President of Marketing and Communications at AMI.

**Evolution from content distributor to content creator**

What started as a charity reading service for the visually-impaired in 1989 has evolved to a not-for-profit, bilingual, multi-platform media company that delivers content through AMI-tv, AMI-audio, AMI-télé, and the AMI-tv app. Among its key inclusivity innovations is integrated described video, where key visual elements are incorporated in the pre-production, production, and post-production phases. This makes the programming accessible to all.

As AMI shifts from content distribution to content creation, media inclusion

remains top of mind in all its programming — from entertaining news programs to engaging and informative shows on business, technology, arts, and culture. "In addition, all of AMI's on-air personalities and reporters are members of the blind and partially-sighted community, so people see themselves reflected and get a more true-to-life perspective on some of these issues," says Burke. 

Anne Papmehl

To learn more about how AMI's inclusive content is challenging and empowering the blind and partially-sighted community, visit [ami.ca](http://ami.ca).

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**Peter Burke**

Vice President, Marketing & Communications, Accessible Media Inc.

## NOW with Dave Brown debuts February 3 on AMI

AMI has got a brand-new morning show called NOW with Dave Brown. Why is the word "now" so important? Let Dave explain.



# Connecting Dry Eye Disease and Glaucoma

When we talk about diseases of the eye, there are two major ones that come to mind: dry eye disease and glaucoma. Both diseases have no symptoms in their early stages and require personalized treatment and chronic care. To learn more, we connected with eyeLABS' Dr. Richard Maharaj and Dr. Faran Vafaie.

**Mediaplanet** *What is dry eye disease?*  
**eyeLABS** Dry eye disease (DED) is a disease of the eye surface and the related protective tearing system. The normal tear components (water, oil, and protein) are out of balance, which results in inflammation and damage to the eye surface, namely the cornea (the clear window we see through), the conjunctiva (the white tissue around the eye), and the eyelids and associated tear-producing glands. Basically the tears become "sick" both chemically and structurally.

**MP** *What is glaucoma?*  
**eL** Glaucoma, one of the leading causes of blindness in Canada, is a disease that causes degeneration of the optic nerve. In its early stages, glaucoma has no symptoms but as it advances it can cause irreversible blindness. It's often referred to as the "silent thief of sight." This is why early detection and treatment are critical in preventing vision loss.

**MP** *Are DED and glaucoma linked?*  
**eL** These two diseases aren't directly linked, as they affect two different parts of the eye. However, glaucoma is treated by reducing pressure inside the eye through the use of daily eye drops. Unfortunately, the drops that are used to manage glaucoma can oftentimes cause DED or make it worse.

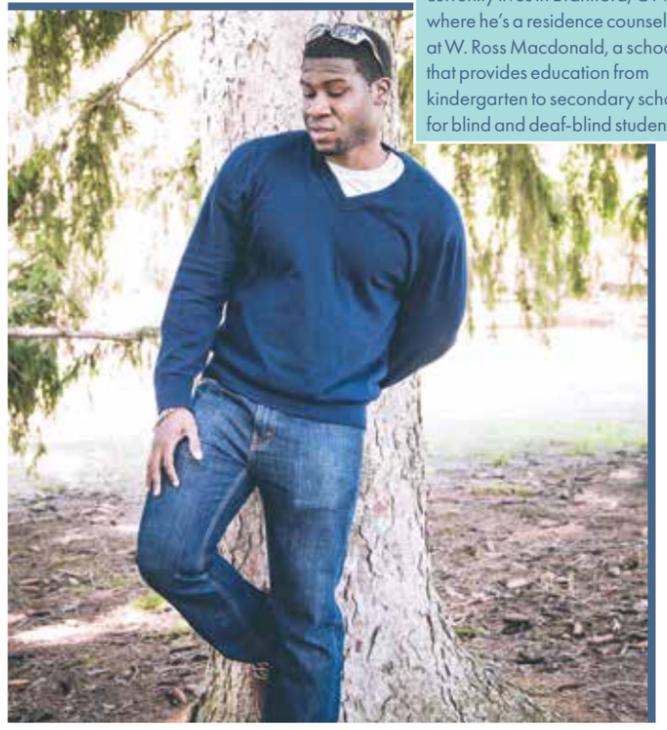
**MP** *What are the signs and symptoms of dry eye in a glaucoma patient?*  
**eL** Symptoms range from having to blink to clear your vision to more severe ones like

redness, burning, and watery eyes. Most glaucoma eye drops contain preservatives and can worsen inflammation and dryness. With regular exposure to preservatives and other ingredients, the tissues and tears are affected, which contributes to DED. Mild symptoms can be easily missed, so it's best to see your optometrist to address it early, because it can be progressive and more challenging to treat the longer it progresses.

**MP** *How can dry eye be treated in a glaucoma patient?*

**eL** Traditionally, glaucoma has been a "wait and watch" disease. There has been a recent trend toward the treatment of glaucoma being more proactive, with the use of lasers and microinvasive procedures. This has helped reduce eye drop use and avoid riskier surgical procedures — both of which are risk factors for DED. Alternatively, non-preserved lubricating drops, omega 3 supplements, and proper hydration are great steps to take. All glaucoma patients should have baseline exams with their eye doctor. 

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Ben Akuoko is 32 years old and currently lives in Brantford, ON, where he's a residence counsellor at W. Ross Macdonald, a school that provides education from kindergarten to secondary school for blind and deaf-blind students.

## Ben's Fight for Sight

**A**lthough I was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa at the tender age of two, I didn't realize I was visually-impaired until later in my life. Growing up, I did so many of the things sighted kids do: I played football, basketball, and baseball. I rode bikes and competed in track and field. I played computer and video games and watched movies and television. I never thought that my limited vision would get in the way of those activities. But now at the age of 32, I'm beginning to see more signs of my eye condition — and I'm realizing the impact that it's having on my life. I can't do some of the activities I used to be able to do, which is difficult to come to terms with.

With that in mind, I'm lucky for all the moments I get to be part of. This is a new chapter in my life where I'm meeting people in similar circumstances and learning new things about myself. I'm constantly adjusting to a life with lower vision, but I'm willing

to overcome this challenge.

I feel that I have to fight blindness every day. Whether it's battling the stigmas faced by people with low vision or the challenges of accepting who I am, I will never give up hope. I refuse to let low vision alter my goals, but it would be nice one day to have sight — both for myself and for my sister, who has Stargardt disease.

I want the barriers that I face to one day disappear so I can reach my full potential. I want to be able to pick up a book and read. I want to play basketball with my friends. I want to see my family members' faces again. I want to look back at old photo albums. I want to be able to watch my favourite shows, and to go for a run without fear. These are things that I believe will ultimately be possible, thanks to the work of organizations like Fighting Blindness Canada and the Canadian Council of the Blind. 

Ben Akuoko



## When It Comes to Vision Health, Informed Consent Is Key

Millions of Canadians — and the people who care about them — are affected by vision loss, but changing government mandates could affect access to quality treatment. Here's how the Eye See You Campaign is standing up for patient rights.

"If we're very lucky, we get older," says Dr. Jane Barratt, secretary general of the International Federation of Aging (IFA). "We should be celebrating the fact that there are more and more older Canadians, with average life expectancy increasing. One of the critical factors, though, is to maintain or improve functional ability and autonomy of older people. Vision health is key for this."

Today, about 1.5 million Canadians identify as having sight loss, while about 5.59 million have an eye disease that could lead to sight loss down the road. With an aging population, that number is set to

increase — especially if patients don't have access to early, appropriate interventions that could diminish their chance of losing their vision.

The use of biologics, complex drugs produced from living organisms, versus biosimilars, which are less-expensive alternatives to the former, is an ongoing debate in the field of vision health. As the conversation continues, informed choice for patients facing age-related vision problems is vital.

### Vision loss — an inevitable part of aging, or a preventable problem?

The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies (CADTH) recently announced a review of biosimilar drugs which includes treatments for vision loss. The conversation about shifting towards biosimilars continues between government, physician groups, and other stakeholders.

It's essential that patient outcomes supercede cost-effectiveness throughout this process — especially since certain biologic drugs have a long history of proven efficacy for preventing vision loss.

"Vision loss doesn't have to be an inevitable part of getting older," says Dr. Barratt. "We're not against biosimilars.

But there are a lot of unanswered questions, and we are very cautious about switching when we have not answered key questions about not only economic cost, but social and psychological cost."

### The Eye See You campaign for options and informed consent

The Eye See You campaign, an initiative coordinated by the IFA, centers on advancing awareness and understanding of vision loss therapy for the Canadians. Its goal? To further patient empowerment and physician autonomy, and make sure Canadians have access to top-line treatments — because dollars and cents shouldn't dictate our access to vision-saving treatments.

From developing informational materials to facilitating conversations between stakeholders, it's all about raising awareness. "Our focus is on increasing the level of education and knowledge exchange when it comes to vision health," says Dr. Barratt. "We'll also be putting together an ad hoc advisory group made up of retinal specialists and patient groups." The campaign is affiliated with the Canadian Council of the Blind, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind,



**Dr. Jane Barratt**  
 Secretary General,  
 International Federation on  
 Ageing (IFA)

and the World Blind Union, to name a few.

Since vision health goes hand in hand with maintaining autonomy in an aging population, vision loss has a cascade effect that touches the family, friends, and caregivers of directly affected individuals.

What can you do to get involved? Stay informed about your options, ask your physician about all available treatment options, and sign up for updates at [eyeseeyou.care](http://eyeseeyou.care).

"At the heart of this, it really is about how we maintain and ensure an enabling environment that offers older people the opportunity to do what they value," says Dr. Barratt. "People need to be informed and educated to be part of that conversation, and they should be able to ask questions about the treatments they're offered." 

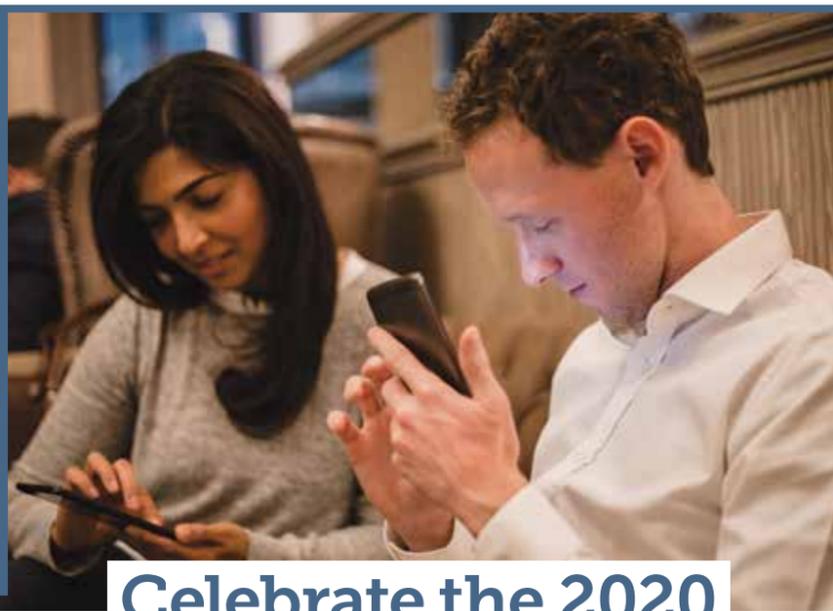
Veronica Stephenson

The growing crisis of vision loss can be prevented



Eye See You

Learn more at [eyeseeyou.care](http://eyeseeyou.care)



## Celebrate the 2020 Experience Expo

As part of White Cane Week, the Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB) Toronto Visionaries Chapter is hosting the Experience Expo, Canada's only consumer show dedicated to Canadians who are blind and partially-sighted, on Saturday, February 8 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre in Toronto. The Expo will feature dozens of exhibitors, products, and services addressing every aspect of living with vision loss. Get connected with information on new adaptive technologies, recreation and leisure, tactile art and accessible entertainment, sports and fitness, transportation, education, employment, government supports, advocacy issues, and more.

This year, the Experience Expo takes as its theme the ability for all of us to see clearly, to see the potential of people with sight loss as equal to the potential of other Canadians, and to show that, when it comes to having a clear view of their own potential, those who live with sight loss have a vision that's 20/20.

### A community-building experience

Following the Expo, the Visionaries Forum will take place from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. This panel discussion will focus on independence through gainful employment, and will feature panelists Deborah Gold, Executive Director of BALANCE for Blind Adults, and Laurent Messier, Program Lead of the Accessible Technology Program, among others.

If you'd like to attend the Forum or join us for the post-event Community Social, please RSVP to [info@cbbtorontovisionaries.ca](mailto:info@cbbtorontovisionaries.ca) or call the voicemail line at 416-760-2163. Visit [cbbtorontovisionaries.ca/WCW.php](http://cbbtorontovisionaries.ca/WCW.php) for more info.



In partnership with

Shown here is Louise Gillis (centre left), skip of Team Nova Scotia, being presented with the 2019 AMI Canadian Vision Impaired Curling Championship trophy by Peter Burke (centre right), VP of Marketing and Communications at AMI.



## The Exciting Vision Impaired Curling Championship

As part of White Cane Week, the Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB) hosts the annual AMI Canadian Vision Impaired Curling Championship in Ottawa. Sponsored by Accessible Media Inc. (AMI), the five-day-long tournament brings together curlers from across the country — plus guides, coaches, officials, and volunteers — to celebrate the rich history of blind curling and to engage in spirited competition.

The curling championship showcases the abilities of blind and low-vision curlers in one of the nation's most respected winter sports. Blind curling requires few modifications. Teams participate in a round robin leading to a playoff series that culminates in a championship game. With over 70 years of curling history in the blind and low-vision community, the CCB encourages members of all ages and abilities to take up the sport. Encouraging participation in sports teams and tournaments for people with vision loss is an important part of the CCB's mandate.

### Showcasing ability, not disability

The championship celebrates the opportunity for people with vision loss to share common interests and social activities, and gives athletes from around the country the chance to meet and to compete with great sportsmanship.

White Cane Week aims to publicize the abilities of people who are blind and partially-sighted, rather than emphasizing the disability that blindness itself presents. The curling championship exemplifies this perfectly.

AMI-audio will broadcast live from the championship game. Visit [ami.ca/schedules](http://ami.ca/schedules) to find the AMI-audio channel with your local TV service provider or stream coverage online by visiting [ami.ca/listenlive](http://ami.ca/listenlive).

In partnership with



## CCB Mobile Eye Clinics: Providing Eye Examinations for Our Seniors and Children

The Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB) introduced Mobile Eye Clinics (MECs) in May 2013 for seniors and a year later for children. The MEC program focuses on vision treatment and prevention, and is a comprehensive initiative designed to conduct eye care examinations directly in seniors' homes, retirement residences, long-term care homes, and to children in their schools, and thus has the ability to reach thousands of seniors and children, especially at lower-income schools across Canada.

Each MEC has the capacity to examine 2,500 students and approximately 1,250 to 1,500 seniors per year. Through various partnerships including with Bruyère Continuing Care, the Bruyère Research Institute, Ottawa Public Health, Eastern Ontario Public Health, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, and the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario, CCB's MECs have conducted over 8,000 comprehensive eye examinations. MECs bring portable eye examination equipment, a registered optometrist, and an experienced support team, including members of Lions Clubs from District A4, to each venue.

Not only does the CCB focus its efforts on supporting the existing blind and vision-impaired community, it also focuses on health promotion in order to prevent vision loss. The organization believes that the promotion of vision health is just as important as treatment.

In Canada, 80 percent of vision loss is avoidable. Vision loss is one of the major factors behind senior slips and falls, and is a recognized learning disability in children.

The results of CCB's MEC initiative have been alarming. MEC examinations of seniors found that 56 percent were diagnosed with vision problems needing correction, with many requiring immediate intervention. Senior slips and falls cost our health care system \$2 billion annually, and 30 percent are caused by vision issues. Seniors are hospitalized longer for slips and falls (averaging nine days) than for any other cause. Vision loss' negative effect on the Canadian economy is \$15.8 billion per year and that cost is expected to double by 2031.

Over 24 percent of the children examined (who averaged eight years of age) required optometric intervention or further assessment, and, in some instances, were legally blind, completely unbeknownst to their parents and teachers. Through its partners, the MEC program provides

free eyewear to all children and seniors who cannot afford them.

The CCB's research demonstrates that mobile health clinics are a cost-effective and efficient way to provide support, prevention, and treatment to communities that would otherwise go unvisited. There are currently approximately 2,000 MECs operating in North America, mostly in the U.S.

As an organization governed by the

blind and those with low vision, the CCB knows intimately the effects of vision loss. To date, the CCB has incurred all costs on the project development and the initial pilot, and now wishes to expand the program across Ontario and eventually all of Canada.

The Canadian Council of the Blind's Mobile Eye Clinic Lions Club van.



# WHITE CANE WEEK® 2020

Feb. 2 – Feb. 8

In the first full week of February each year, the CCB celebrates White Cane Week, a public awareness campaign which broadens the understanding of vision loss and its impact on all Canadians. For more information visit [cbbnational.net](http://cbbnational.net).

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