HOW WE CAN WORK TOGETHER

WHO, in collaboration with international agencies and development partners and with the support of donors, can strengthen and sustain partnerships and networks to:

- Develop policies, programmes and training to improve access by the poor to quality eye health-care services.
- Build capacity for countries to integrate eye care in primary health care, address equity issues, explore financing options and articulate links to universal health care.
- Strengthen advocacy to mobilize political and public support for quality eye health-care services for all, especially for the poor.

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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Division of Building Healthy Communities and Populations

Prevention of Blindness
ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Visual impairment …

- Affects many people in the Western Pacific Region. An estimated 90 million people have visual impairment, with over 10 million people blind and 80 million people with low vision.
- Can be debilitating to individuals and their families. Educational opportunities, gainful employment and productivity are severely compromised by the loss of sight and poor vision. These problems are more pronounced among the poor who do not have access to basic eye care.
- Has substantial economic consequences. In 2000, the global economic loss from blindness and visual impairment was estimated at US$ 42 billion, rising to $110 billion annually by 2020.
- Mainly affects older people and is expected to increase as a public health problem due to population growth and longer life expectancy in the Region and globally.

WHY WE NEED TO ACT

An estimated 80% of visual impairment is avoidable. It can be treated or prevented.

Globally, the main causes of avoidable blindness and low vision are cataracts and uncorrected refractive error, respectively.

Cost-effective strategies for treatment both conditions exist.

- Cataract surgery, for example, costs less than US$ 150 in most low- and middle- income countries.
- Eyeglasses for uncorrected refractive error could cost less than US$ 5 in most countries.
- Other main causes, such as diabetic retinopathy, can be either prevented or treated successfully, if detected early.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Our vision is a Region 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. This can be achieved if:

- National policies, plans and programmes for eye health are developed or strengthened.
- Eye-care sections are included in national lists of essential medicines, diagnostics and health technologies.
- Eye health is integrated into national health plans and budgets.
- A sustainable workforce for the provision of comprehensive eye-care services is developed and maintained.