

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
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**USC Roski Eye Institute Joins The National Academies  
in Call to Public Policy Health Leaders for Population Health Transformation;  
Focus on Solving Uncorrected Visual Impairment by 2030**

*Report findings and recommendations include:*

- 16 million Americans with uncorrected visual impairment expected to double by 2050
- Call to emphasize and highlight vision health as a part of the overall population health efforts
- Need for increased health literacy, safe work and play environments to build healthy communities

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LOS ANGELES – A [report](#) issued by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM), *Making Eye Health a Population Health Imperative: Vision for Tomorrow*, offers a clear lens into healthy communities by 2030 and it starts with addressing uncorrected and avoidable visual impairment (VI) that affects millions of Americans today and is projected to dramatically escalate over the next 30 years. [University of Southern California \(USC\) Roski Eye Institute](#) director and interim dean of the Keck School of Medicine of USC, [Rohit Varma](#), MD, MPH, was one of the thought leaders who participated on the National Academies report committee, with much of his recent National Eye Institute (NEI) research informing the committee recommendations.

The report includes some of [Varma's research](#) on the nation's prevalence of visual impairment and blindness - especially among aging baby boomers, older women and minorities – that is expected to double by 2050 to impact more than 16 million Americans. By 2050, 86.7 million boomers will be over the age of 65 – almost 1 in 5 Americans – when many debilitating eye diseases and vision loss from glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy (DR), age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and other diseases can occur.

According to Prevent Blindness America, which was one of 10 sponsors the report, more than [142 million Americans over the age of 40 experience vision problems](#) including millions of children who are at risk for long-term academic, social and physical problems without appropriate care. The economic burden from vision loss and eye disorders cost the U.S. \$139 billion in 2013 making it among the costliest health conditions in the nation. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) 2010 data, the annual economic impact of top chronic conditions includes heart disease/stroke (\$315 billion), diabetes (\$245 billion) and cancer (\$157 billion).

In addition, the report issues a comprehensive call to action for institutional as well as societal changes on addressing vision loss that can adversely impact other chronic illnesses and increase the risk for death from injuries and other issues. The report advises that overall medicine has to embrace eye care while the eye care system has to address fragmentation and lack of coordination across and within federal entities.

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USC Roski Eye Institute Joins Other National Thought Leaders on Report to Transform

## Vision Impairment Population Health Efforts

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The committee's recommendations include creating a national health agenda that includes eye care as part of overall health literacy and creating safer employer, school and community environments. The report advises that collaboration on public awareness campaigns that promote eye health policies and practices across the lifespan should be led by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) but also include other federal agencies, nonprofit and for-profit organizations, professional organizations, employers, public health agencies and the media. It also calls for developing a comprehensive surveillance program, overseen by the CDC, to document epidemiological patterns, risk factors, care patterns and costs related to vision loss.

“Whether it is coordinated research efforts to understand the public health burden related to vision impairment, a comprehensive education campaign around preventing blinding and debilitating eye diseases from infants to our older seniors and among underserved populations, or creating safer environments where we live, work and play, we can transform population health outcomes in the next 14 years,” said Varma. “Putting eye health on the national health priority list is paramount in achieving a healthier society.”

As one of the world's leading experts in population-based eye diseases, Varma has led several NEI-funded studies including the recent largest population-based study of adult Latinos and age-related macular degeneration (AMD) [Los Angeles Latino Eye Study \(LALES\)](#) and the largest study of Chinese Americans and AMD [Chinese American Eye Study \(CHES\)](#). He has also been the principal investigator of many major National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded studies including the [Multi-Ethnic Pediatric Eye Diseases Study \(MEPEDS\)](#) and the [African-American Eye Disease Study \(AFEDS\)](#). The USC Roski Eye Institute is ranked in the Top 2 of the nation's top grant recipients from the NEI and has achieved more than \$32 million in annual grant funding.

Varma was one of five committee members who participated in a webinar on the NASEM report to be published in full later this year and was led by study chair Steven Teutsch, MD, MPH, USC Leonard D. Schaeffer Center for Health Policy and Economics. Click here for more information about the [NASEM report](#).

### **About the USC Roski Eye Institute**

The USC Roski Eye Institute, part of the Keck Medicine of USC university-based medical enterprise, has been a leader in scientific research and innovative clinical treatments for more than 40 years. Among the top two funded academic-based medical centers by the National Eye Institute (NEI) research grants and a nationally top-ranked ophthalmology program in *U.S. News & World Report's* annual “Best Hospitals” issue for more than 20 years, the USC Roski Eye Institute is headquartered in Los Angeles with clinics in Arcadia, Beverly Hills and Pasadena.

Patients from across the country come to see the USC Roski Eye Institute experts who treat a comprehensive array of eye diseases across the life spectrum from infants to aging seniors. The USC Roski Eye Institute is known for its scientific research and clinical innovation including: creation of the Argus retinal prosthesis implant (also known as the “bionic eye”) for retinitis pigmentosa patients; stem cell therapies for those who have age-related macular degeneration; discovery of the gene that is the cause of the most common eye cancer in children; treatment for eye infections for AIDS patients; inventors of the most widely used glaucoma implant in the world and pioneers of a device for long-term intraocular drug delivery as well as the use of ultra-high speed Fourier domain optical coherence tomography (OCT) to improve glaucoma diagnosis. For more information visit: [usceye.org](http://usceye.org).

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