



Press Release

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American Academy of Ophthalmology Joins Indian Health Service in Treatment of Diabetic Retinopathy

The American Academy of Ophthalmology and the Indian Health Service (IHS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, announced today that they have established a pilot program to provide evaluation and surgical treatment for diabetic retinopathy within high-risk American Indian and Alaska Native populations that have limited access to such services. Diabetic retinopathy is a leading cause of blindness.

American Indians and Alaska Natives have almost three times the mortality rate for diabetes as the general U.S. population. However, less than 50 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives with diabetes receive an annual diabetic eye examination.

“This partnership is an important link to address an unmet need, providing evaluation and possible treatment of vision-threatening diabetic retinopathy regardless of the ability to pay,” said H. Dunbar Hoskins Jr., M.D., executive vice president of the academy.

The program will be administered in association with the Minnesota Academy of Ophthalmology and the North Dakota Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons for patients identified and referred by the pilot facilities in Cass Lake, and Red Lake, Minn. It will increase access to quality care by volunteer ophthalmologists, independent of the patients’ or referring facility’s capacity to pay for the services. It is limited to appropriate treatments such as laser applications and intraocular injections in the Eye M.D.’s private offices. Volunteer Eye M.D.s will complete an orientation that includes topics specific to American Indian and Alaska Native cultures, practices, and beliefs.

“We are extremely grateful to the academy for working with the IHS to provide this critical and much needed treatment,” said IHS Director Robert G. McSwain. “I know that our patients will be grateful for this generous assistance from the academy and volunteer members.”

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Additional information about the IHS is available on the IHS Web site at <http://www.ihs.gov> .

The American Academy of Ophthalmology is the world’s largest association of eye physicians and surgeons – Eye M.D.s – with more than 27,000 members worldwide, representing more than 90 percent of practicing U.S. ophthalmologists. Further information is available on the Academy’s Web site at www.aao.org.