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**European Blind Union
Press release
Paris, 13.10.2016**

**World Sight Day**

**World Sight Day is celebrated every year on the second Thursday in October and is the occasion to increase awareness of the global issue of avoidable blindness and vision loss.**

The theme for this year is Universal Eye Health, and it is an ongoing theme, to be used over the coming years as it links to the World Health Organization’s (WHO) [Universal Eye Health: A Global Action Plan 2014-2019](http://www.who.int/blindness/actionplan/en/). The vision of the Global Action Plan is “a world 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.” The Plan builds upon [VISION 2020: The Right to Sight](http://www.iapb.org/vision-2020), a global initiative to eliminate avoidable blindness, which is a programme of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB).

EBU would particularly like to use World Sight Day to highlight the project for the creation of the world’s first Vision Bill of Rights, an international alliance to prevent vision loss of persons with diabetes. Diabetic retinopathy (DR) is the most common diabetic eye disease and diabetic macular edema (DME) is the leading cause of blindness among working adults around the world. Globally, 387 million people are affected by diabetes and that population is projected to increase to 592 million people by 2035. The prevalence of diabetic vision loss is predicted to increase in parallel. With screening, early detection, and prompt intervention, diabetic vision loss can be a highly treatable condition. Now, through this unique alliance of patient groups and advocacy organisations with a focus on both vision and diabetes, an international “Vision Bill of Rights” to protect the needs of patients with Diabetes and advocate for proper and timely prevention and diagnose interventions could come into being.

World Sight Day is also an important opportunity to focus on the issues that affect blind and partially sighted people in their everyday lives. They face barriers and discrimination on a daily basis and these are often compounded by multiple other forms of discrimination on issues such as gender, race and other related disabilities and/or disorders.

For example, it is estimated that seventy percent of people that are fully blind suffer from a disorder known as Non-24, defined as “a chronic, circadian rhythm disorder resulting from the misalignment of the… master body clock to the 24-hour day, disrupting the sleep-wake cycle” (link: [VANDA Pharmaceuticals](http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=196233&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=2191291), 2016). Non-24 can cause many people to have trouble falling asleep at night and trouble staying awake during the day, which can cause major issues for children at school and for adults at work. This disorder carries with it a lot of stigma and can cause discrimination at school, in the workplace and even at home, since the disorder is not well-known, and many people may think the person is simply lazy and therefore unsuitable as an employee or student. Even though Non-24 is so prevalent in the blind community, there is still little awareness about it, which does not help decrease the stigma that people with Non-24 often face.

For further information on the above and many other eye health topics the World Blind Union (WBU), of which EBU is a member, will shortly be launching a page on their website titled Vision Health Matters to offer resources for both the general public as well as blind and partially sighted persons themselves to learn more about different eye health issues as well as links to treatment and prevention solutions. It will be available by November.

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