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News Release

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For Immediate Release

Study Shows Americans Lack Critical Facts About Maintaining Eye Health Disparities are Greatest Among Hispanics

National Institutes of Health, March 13, 2008—Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) and The National Eye Institute (NEI), one of the Federal government's National Institutes of Health released national survey findings today, showing that most adults value their eyesight and are aware of serious eye diseases commonly associated with visual impairment. However, they lack knowledge of how and when to seek timely detection and treatment of those diseases.

Seventy-one percent of respondents reported that a loss of their eyesight would rate as a 10 on a scale of 1 to 10, meaning that it would have the greatest impact on their day-to-day life. However, only eight percent knew that there are no early warning signs of glaucoma, a group of diseases that can damage the eye's optic nerve and result in vision loss and blindness.

Fifty-one percent said that they have heard of eye diseases caused by diabetes, but only 11 percent knew that such diseases do not have early warning signs. Only 16 percent had ever heard the term "low vision," which affects millions of Americans. Low vision is vision loss that regular glasses, contact lenses, medicine, or surgery cannot correct, making everyday tasks difficult to do. Reading the mail, shopping, cooking, seeing the TV, and writing can seem challenging.

Hispanic respondents reported the lowest access to eye health information, knew the least about eye health, and were the least likely to have their eyes examined among all racial/ethnic groups participating in the survey. Forty-one percent of Hispanics reported that they had not seen or heard anything about eye health or disease in the last year, compared with 28 percent of Asians, 26 percent of Blacks, and 16 percent of Caucasians.

These findings are from the 2005 Survey of Public Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Related to Eye Health and Disease, also called the KAP Study. More than 3,000 randomly selected adults participated in the national telephone survey between October 2005 and January 2006. The study's findings reinforce the critical need to educate the public about common eye diseases, such as glaucoma, diabetic eye disease, and age-related macular degeneration.

"Good eye sight is important to our quality of life and it is essential for adults to have accurate information to help them make informed decisions about their eye health needs," said Paul A. Sieving, M.D., Ph.D., director of NEI. "The KAP survey results will help us identify specific ways in which we can close the gap in knowledge about eye diseases and address the disparities that exist."

NEI plans to use the survey results to develop ways to raise public awareness of eye disease and the importance of early detection and treatment. NEI also will expand its educational outreach to Hispanics, who are at higher risk for developing certain eye diseases and conditions.

In addition, NEI will increase its efforts to educate health care providers on how to communicate with patients about ways to preserve and protect their vision. "The survey shows us that nearly one quarter of Americans have not seen or heard anything about eye health or disease, and yet more than 90 percent have seen a health care provider," Sieving said. "We need to provide these doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals with the tools they need to educate their patients on how to better maintain their eye health."

LCIF has developed the Lions Eye Health Program (LEHP), a community-based education program for Lions clubs, other community organizations, and individuals to promote healthy vision and to raise awareness of the causes of preventable vision loss. The mission of LEHP is to empower communities to save sight through the early detection and timely treatment of glaucoma and diabetic eye disease, encourage those at higher risk to get a dilated eye exam, and educate those with low vision and their caregivers about the condition.

"Lions have long been champions of people who are blind and visually impaired. By better educating the

public on the need for regular eye exams and timely treatment of eye diseases, we can end preventable blindness," said Jimmy Ross, Chairperson, LCIF.

For more information about the KAP Study, visit: <http://www.nei.nih.gov/nehep/kap>.

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To promote this study and the finding, LCIF Chairperson Jimmy Ross spoke on six radio new shows around the U.S. March 13 and appeared on a television news show with Academy Award winning actor Ernest Borgnine and Dr. Emily Chew with NEI. Borgnine and Chew appeared on an additional 20 news casts around the country. This press release has appeared in more than 1,300 newspapers throughout the U.S.

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Lions Clubs International Foundation provides grant funding to Lions districts for large-scale humanitarian projects too extensive for Lions to finance on their own. LCIF is the charitable arm of Lions Clubs International, the largest service club organization in the world with 1.3 million members in 201 geographic areas and countries. The Foundation aids Lions in making a greater impact in their local communities, as well as around the world. LCIF was recently ranked the number one NGO in a Financial Times study. Through the SightFirst program, LCIF has improved eye care services for hundreds of millions of people, distributed sight-saving medication, built eye hospitals, and trained eye health care workers. For more information, visit www.lcif.org.

The National Eye Institute (NEI) is part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and is the Federal government's lead agency for vision research that leads to sight-saving treatments and plays a key role in reducing visual impairment and blindness. For more information, visit <http://www.nei.nih.gov>.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) - The Nation's Medical Research Agency - includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary Federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information, visit <http://www.nih.gov>.