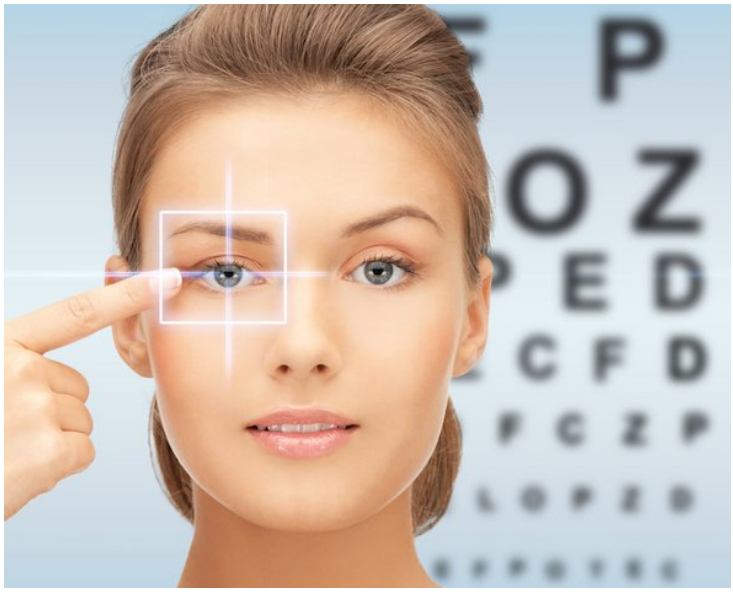
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Collaborations are imperative to strengthen eye care

25 March 2021 | Views

If we look at India, the cumulative gross national income (GNI) loss due to blindness is Rs 9,062 billion for adults and Rs 3,311 billion for children



1.1 billion people experience vision loss primarily because they do not have access to eye care services. Over 90 per cent of those with vision loss live in low- and middle-income countries.

It is imperative to also point out that vision impairment led to global productivity loss of $410.7 billion in 2020, according to the recent Lancet Global Health Commission Report. If we look at India, the cumulative gross national income (GNI) loss due to blindness is Rs 9,062 billion for adults and Rs 3,311 billion for children. That is an unfathomable loss.

The loss is not just on the global or national level. When we look at children, for instance, their inability to see is directly linked with their inability to cope with studies or fulfil their fundamental right to education. So, given this background, Orbis prioritised childhood blindness in India and has been working towards avoidable blindness elimination for two decades now.

20-year footprint	**Outcome**
Children's Eye Center Network	33 (across 17 states)
Quality eye screenings	>17500000
Medical and optical treatment	>1600000
Ophthalmic surgeries	>180,000

How does the current COVID-19 scenario affect the work of eye care organisations? Due to the lockdown, all of us would have to prioritise some areas of work such as refractive error. The pandemic and the consequent lockdowns have created the opportunity for the eye care community to address refractive error. We will need to put in a lot more effort than we did before the pandemic to address the issue.

The other aspect of eye care which we need to reinforce is the importance of annual eye exam. It has to be at the forefront. We need to encourage everyone to go for annual eye check-up given the amount of screen time increase that we have witnessed over the past year and it continues at present. While our focus pre-pandemic was on covering a large number of people and children in the underserved community, now we have to and are already focusing on the quality of services.

Our quality of services has always been a priority but given the current COVID-19 pandemic safety protocols, it is a priority to ensure safety. So, it will be absolutely necessary for us to make that shift from quantity to quality of services.

Tele-consultation and telehealth have proven to be effective avenues for eye care service to patients during the lockdown and technology will play a ground-breaking role in future as well given the COVID-19 situation.

I should reiterate that our success does not lie in isolated initiatives or interventions but in collaborations and partnerships. In 2017, blindness was projected to triple to nearly 115 million people by 2050. Now it is projected to reach 60 million by 2050. This shift has been because of the collaborative work of the eye care, government and non-profit sectors. It goes without saying, then, that collaborations are imperative to eliminate avoidable blindness and accelerate the fulfilment of the larger sustainable development goals.

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