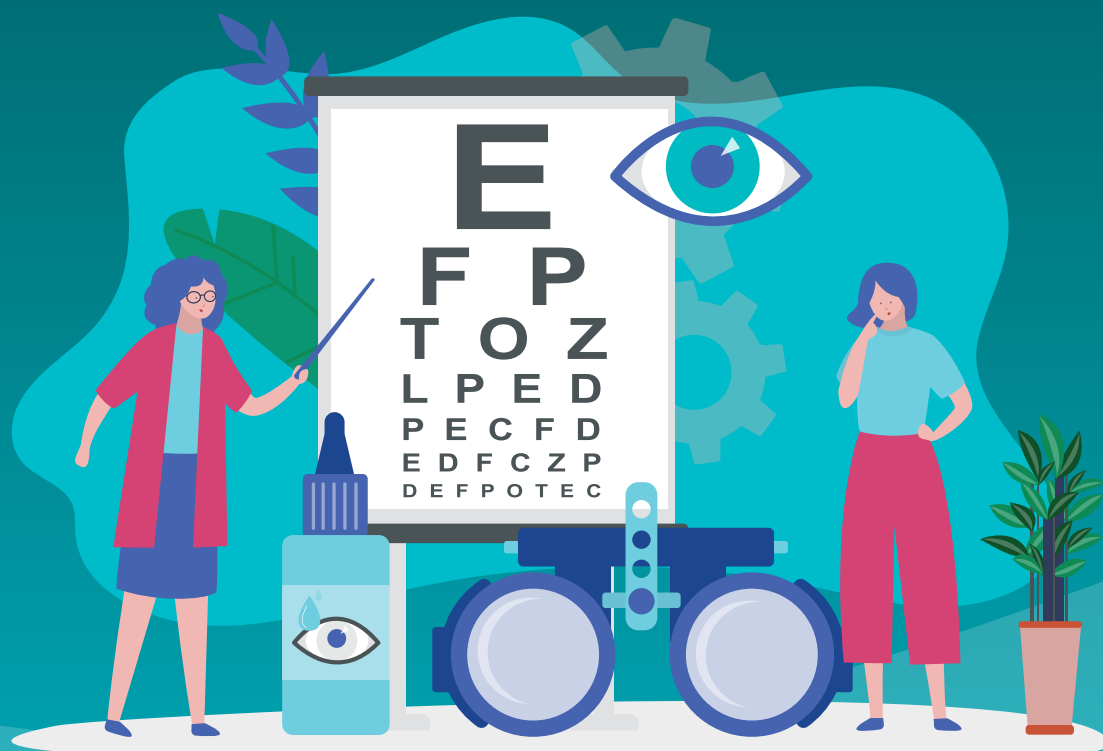


In Plain Sight:

Examining America's Eye Health Challenge and How to Solve It

4th Annual Vision Wellness Study

Presented by  **VersantHealth**®



Vision health in America stands at a critical turning point. As digital screen use increases, populations age, and cost concerns persist, the importance of proactive vision care has never been greater. Yet, a revealing contradiction exists. Many Americans simply don't feel a sense of urgency about getting their eyes checked — and believe deteriorating eye health is an inevitable part of aging.

This report explores what's driving this disconnect and uncovers possible solutions. When people understand that preventive eye care can help mitigate vision issues and comprehensive eye exams can detect serious health conditions like diabetes and heart disease, they are more motivated to seek vision care.

For employers, health plans, and vision care providers, these findings present clear opportunities to increase engagement by reframing how vision benefits are positioned and communicated.

Based on an extensive quantitative study of 3,045 U.S. adults, which was designed to ensure representation across age, gender, geographic location, and employment status, the industry-differentiating research provides statistically significant insights into vision care behaviors and attitudes nationwide.



The quantitative findings are enriched by qualitative interviews with consumers, eye care professionals, benefits brokers, health plan executives, and HR decision-makers.

The insights provide a clear picture of today's eye health landscape and outline a path forward for stakeholders seeking to improve vision health outcomes and increase the value and appreciation of vision benefits.

Inside the Report

Eye Health at a Turning Point	3
A Perfect Storm of Demographic Challenges	
Eye Health's Ripple Effect	
Uncovering the Barriers to Care	
Changing the "If It's Not Broken..." Mindset	7
Making the Well-Being Connection	
A New Line of Sight	
Vision Benefits as a Catalyst to Care	11
Unlocking the Full Value of Vision Benefits	
The Key to Post-Enrollment Clarity	
In-the-Moment Engagement	
Vision Forward: Transforming Challenges into Opportunities	13

Eye Health at a Turning Point

America faces a paradoxical vision health challenge: even as eye problems increase across all age groups, engagement with preventive vision care remains stubbornly static.

Look around any coffee shop, living room, or office, and what do you see? People focused on screens. When you factor in an aging population, proven links between vision and overall health, and barriers to accessing vision care, increasing concerns about declining eye health are undeniable.

Three in four U.S. adults report experiencing disruption in daily activities due to poor eyesight or eye health. Reading (38%), driving at night or in bright conditions (38%), and using screens (30%) lead the list of the most common activities disrupted by poor eye health. More concerning is the fact that 56% of those experiencing disruption report impacts across multiple activities.

Declining eye health is a worldwide challenge. The World Health Organization reports that 2.2 billion people have vision impairments, with nearly half of those cases preventable or unaddressed.¹

As a result, eye health in the U.S. faces a significant turning point, giving vision experts, health plans, and employers a shared responsibility to drive increased awareness, implement best practices, and make a meaningful difference in vision health outcomes.



3 in 4

U.S. adults experience disruptions due to poor eyesight or eye health when performing one or more activities



Driving at night or in bright conditions



Reading



Using screens



Performing work-related tasks



Engaging in hobbies



Managing seasonal allergies



Traveling



Playing sports

A Perfect Storm of Demographic Challenges

America's changing eye health is accelerated by demographic pressures from both ends of the age spectrum. On one side, an aging population faces increasing risk of vision-related conditions, with 74% of Boomers and 64% of Gen X reporting diagnosed vision issues.

Simultaneously, younger Americans face unprecedented vision challenges driven by increasingly digital lifestyles. Gen Z now spends an average of 7.2 hours daily looking at screens within arm's length, with 28% spending 9+ hours daily. Notably, these totals don't include additional use of screens beyond arm's length, such as watching TV, playing video games, or desk-based activities. Even among young children aged 1-11, parents estimate an average of 4.7 hours of daily screen time.

Vision for the Next Generation: What Parents See

63% Parents say they are concerned about the impact of excessive screen time on their children's vision.

60% Parents say they are concerned about the potential impact of screen time on their children's overall health and well-being.

35% Only one-third of parents say their children get regular vision screenings at school.

Slowing the Myopia Curve: Causes, Consequences, and Solutions



58%
of Americans are projected
to have myopia by 2050.²

Environmental factors are fueling the surge

- ✓ Increased close-range visual activities
- ✓ Earlier and longer exposure to digital devices
- ✓ Reduced outdoor time (less exposure to natural light)

Proactive strategies that work

- ✓ The 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds
- ✓ Encourage children to spend at least 2 hours outdoors daily
- ✓ Proper lighting and ergonomics for near work
- ✓ Regular eye exams, especially for children

Some population segments express heightened concerns about the impact of excessive screen time on their well-being. Women are more likely than men to say that screen time has had a big impact, including headaches and dry eye. In addition, people of color are more likely to say their social life (47% more likely), productivity at work (34% more likely), and overall well-being (24% more likely) have been impacted by the time spent in front of screens.

Nationwide, the increase in screen time is a primary driver of a dramatic increase in myopia, also known as nearsightedness. Myopia is projected to affect 58% of the U.S. population by 2050,² more than doubling since the early 1970s.³ Perhaps most concerning, myopia progression onset is increasing in younger age groups.⁴

While genetics play a role in myopia, the recent surge points to environmental factors that can be addressed. Research shows that spending more time in outdoor light and taking regular breaks from close-up work are associated with reduced myopia progression in children. These simple interventions, combined with regular eye exams, represent a promising path to better eye health outcomes.

Eye Health's Ripple Effect

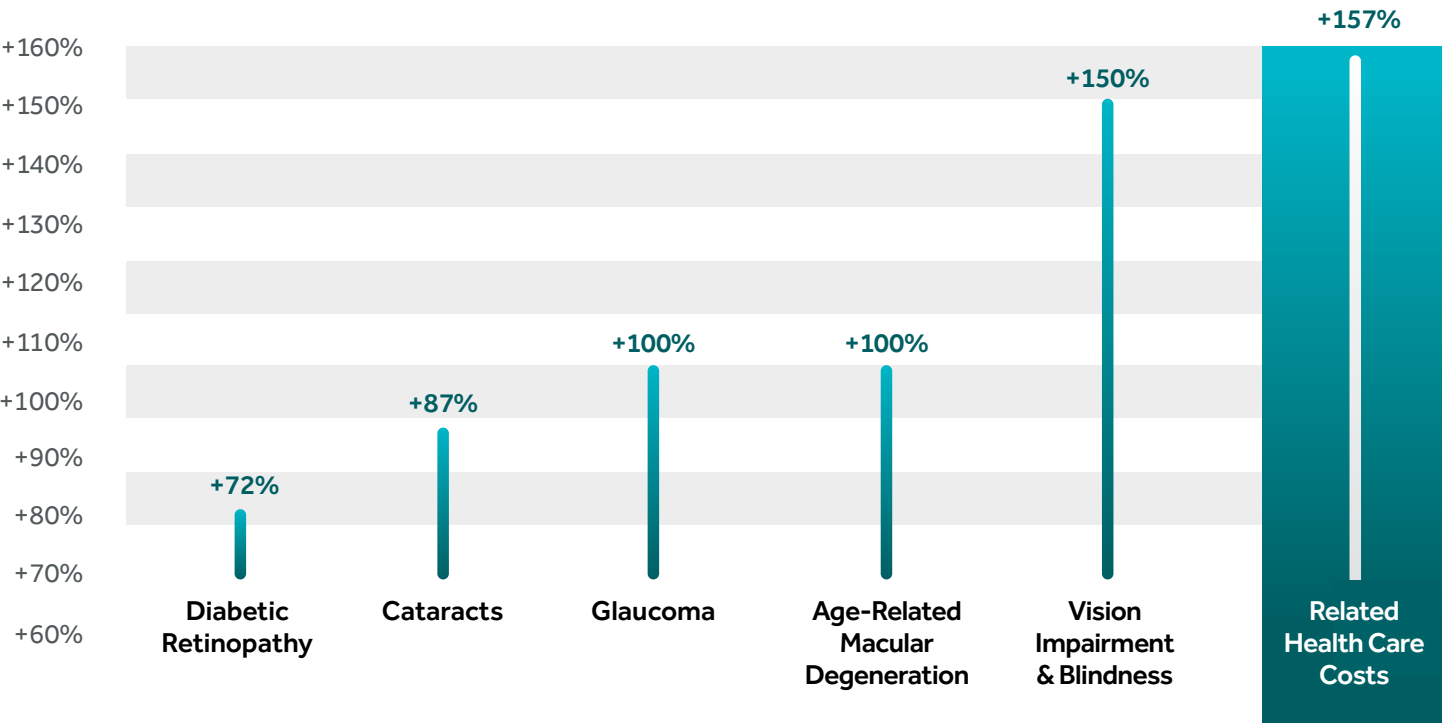
Given the current trajectory, vision health in the U.S. is at a pivotal moment. If left unchecked, the CDC projects dramatic increases in eye health issues that will create a ripple effect on overall health. People with vision loss are at higher risk for type 2 diabetes, depression, stroke, and chronic kidney disease.⁵

Driven in part by the aging population, the higher incidence rates for eye health issues are expected to drive a corresponding 157% rise in related health care costs, bringing the total costs tied to vision problems to \$373 billion.⁵

For many eye health conditions, the early onset is silent, with symptoms appearing only after significant damage has occurred. Routine comprehensive eye exams that go beyond basic vision screening are critical for early detection and treatment.



On the Horizon: Projected Incidence Rates by 2050⁵



Uncovering the Barriers to Care

The declining eye health trends are not irreversible. The right mix of education, early intervention, and preventive care can help slow and even reverse the trends and meaningfully improve long-term health outcomes. The first step is understanding – and addressing – the engagement gap between growing vision challenges and care utilization.

Vision care engagement numbers reveal a surprising disconnect. Increases in vision-related issues have outpaced eye care engagement. While 77% of Americans say they've seen an eye doctor in the past two years – up from 71% in 2022 – the number remains below pre-pandemic levels.

Engagement patterns vary significantly across different groups. Gen Z and Millennials are less likely to have had an eye exam in the last two years, as are persons of color and lower-income populations.

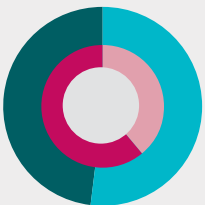
What keeps people from scheduling an eye exam? There are two key factors at play. The first and more intuitive barrier is cost-related. Among individuals who get their eyes tested less than once every two years, 53% say it's because they can't afford the cost of eye care or don't have access to vision care benefits.

Cost barriers can disproportionately affect seniors who already face higher risk of serious vision health issues. While Medicare plans (Part A and B) generally don't cover routine eye exams, most Medicare Advantage plans do, giving older Americans options to alleviate financial concerns related to regular eye care.

Overall, reduced access to and enrollment in vision benefits align with the population segments less likely to have regular vision checkups. Less than half of persons of color or lower-income populations reported having vision benefits.

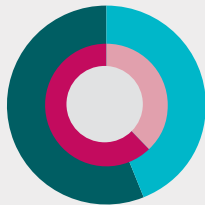
Vision Benefits: A Gateway to Care

No access to or not enrolled in vision benefits:



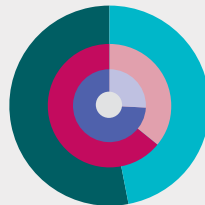
Gen Z:
52%

• Other generations: 39%



Persons of Color:
44%

• Caucasians: 38%



Lower Income
47%

• Medium income (\$50-100k): 36%
• High income (>\$100k): 26%

Vision Care's Gender Divide

Women are:

- More likely to rate their overall eye health as poor

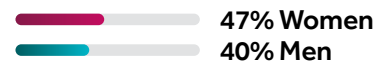


- More likely to say that screen time has a big impact on them, including:

Headaches



Facial Muscle Strain or Eye Strain



- No more likely to have received care from an eye doctor in the last year



- More likely to cite financial and insurance barriers as a reason they have never been to an eye doctor or go less regularly than once every two years



Beyond cost, the second key reason people don't seek eye care is perhaps more challenging to address. It comes down to perception. About half of Americans (54%) say they delay or avoid eye care because it doesn't "feel urgent." Meanwhile, 63% prioritize other aspects of health over eye health – a figure that's even higher among Gen Z (69%) and Millennials (70%).

Addressing these barriers to care will require not only expanded access to vision benefits but also a fundamental shift in how Americans think about vision health and its connection to overall well-being.



"A vision benefit isn't just an add-on — it can be a cornerstone of comprehensive care, empowering us to assess overall health, address evolving vision needs, and ensure the next generation sees the world more clearly."

**Neelam Gor, MD, Chief Clinical Officer,
Medical Policy Council Lead, Versant Health**

A Lack of Urgency



Americans who delay or avoid eye care because it doesn't feel urgent

"It's definitely not a top priority for me. I feel like physical health over eye health definitely beats it for me. Is it on my mind? Yes. It's just probably not as much as it should be."

**Female, Gen Z,
Health Care Worker**





Changing the “If It’s Not Broken...” Mindset

Despite recognizing the importance of eye health, many Americans lack the motivation to act. Helping people understand how eye exams connect to their overall well-being can transform the perception of vision care from optional to essential.

When it comes to vision care, many Americans operate from a reactive position. Without an obvious vision disruption to solve, the motivation to seek care is low. Among people whose households haven’t received eye care in the last two years, two in five cite a “lack of perceived need” as their primary reason. Perhaps most telling, 66% of Americans view deteriorating eye health as an inevitable, unpreventable part of aging – a belief that naturally discourages proactive care.

The lack of urgency stems from a combination of factors. Many people assume clear vision equals healthy eyes, yet most don’t have a reliable benchmark for what truly clear vision feels like. Similarly, even when someone has clear vision, they may not have a sense of their eye health. As a result, minor vision issues often get ignored, especially when they don’t cause significant discomfort or disruption. In addition, without regular vision care, people miss opportunities for early detection of serious health conditions.

10 Health Conditions Eye Exams Can Detect⁶



- Diabetes
- Cancers of blood, tissue, or skin
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Vascular disease
- Multiple sclerosis
- Lupus
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Thyroid disease

Making the Well-Being Connection

Connecting eye health to overall well-being offers a promising path to prompt people to take actions to engage in regular vision care. As a foundation, most Americans intuitively recognize the importance of eye health. However, the belief doesn't necessarily translate into action.

There is less recognition around the critical role regular eye care can play in identifying underlying health problems like diabetes, hypertension, and some cancers. When people understand how comprehensive eye exams can provide early detection for serious medical conditions, their interest in vision care dramatically increases. Nearly nine in 10 said having this knowledge would make them more likely to schedule an eye appointment.

Still, significant knowledge gaps remain. Only 55% of consumers can correctly define the difference between a comprehensive eye exam and a simple vision screening. Even fewer understand the full diagnostic capabilities of eye exams – just 30% are certain that these exams can help diagnose diabetes, and only 25% are certain about hypertension detection.



Understanding the difference between screenings and exams is also important for parents, who may think vision screenings through school are adequate. Comprehensive eye exams are recommended for children, beginning with a baseline exam as an infant and continuing regularly through young adulthood. Ongoing exams evaluate visual development, provide early detection of vision problems, and monitor any vision changes over time.

All Eye Exams Are Not Created Equal

Visual Screenings



- Test basic visual acuity and inspect eye and pupils
- Typically conducted by family doctor or school nurse
- Do not require specialized equipment
- Detect reduced vision or eye conditions but do not diagnose

Comprehensive Eye Exams



- Comprehensive examination of eye health, including acuity, refraction, peripheral, and pressure
- Conducted by an optometrist or ophthalmologist
- Use specialized equipment and dilation of eyes
- Diagnose and identify treatment for eye conditions
- Detect serious health conditions, such as hypertension or diabetes

Closing the knowledge gap represents a meaningful opportunity. By increasing consumer understanding of comprehensive eye exams as preventive screenings for managing holistic health, perceptions can shift from “I’ll go when I notice a problem” to “This is an essential part of staying healthy.”



**H
E
A
L
T
H**

In Their Own Words: A New Line of Sight

When people understand the diagnostic abilities of a comprehensive eye exam, they are more likely to take a proactive approach to vision care.



“It [eye exams] would be more what vision consists of other than just, can you see? ...I feel like maybe explaining that to people would help... It’s not about just if I need glasses, it can affect my general health and lead to a bigger problem.”

**Female, Millennial,
Retail**



“...Why not tell people that getting your eye exam is actually really good for you? It could detect diabetes; it could help you with this. It’s not just a nice to have.”

**Female, Millennial,
Fashion Designer**

“I think they take a little bit of a holistic approach in looking at the health of your eye and what that means in terms of other things like diabetes and stuff like that.”

**Male, Gen X,
Construction**



- ▶ Providers can play a key role in building awareness by emphasizing elements of the exam that play a diagnostic role



“We’ve caught people this close to having a stroke just from what we could see with the blood vessels in the back of the eye. It’s amazing. The refraction, which is the art of getting your prescription, is just a small part of an exam. The overall health of your eye and your cardiovascular system all can be seen through your eyes, and people don’t realize that.”

Eye Care Provider

Vision Benefits as a Catalyst to Care

Understanding eye care's importance doesn't guarantee action. Vision benefits serve as an essential bridge, turning awareness into appointments – but only when coverage is affordable, straightforward, and perceived as valuable.

While increased awareness drives urgency around eye health, access to vision benefits enables people to transform that urgency into action. There is a clear and compelling correlation between having vision benefits, such as vision insurance or discount programs, and seeking regular vision care.

For those without regular eye care, financial barriers create a substantial obstacle. Among people who get their eyes tested less often than every two years, over half (53%) cite affordability issues or lack of vision benefits as the primary reason. The solution appears straightforward. When asked what would encourage them to schedule an appointment, nine in 10 respondents ranked "having eye doctor visits fully or partially covered by vision or health benefits" at the top.

Unlocking the Full Value of Vision Benefits

Cost concerns and lack of vision coverage create barriers to care. But, even when vision benefits are available, some eligible individuals don't enroll – and many who do enroll don't optimize the available benefits.

The missing link? Value perception. Vision benefits typically deliver exceptional value relative to cost, covering preventive exams and offering substantial discounts on eyewear. However, two-thirds (67%) of people offered vision benefits through their employer or health plan report that the value hasn't been clearly explained or they find it confusing to select the right plan.

Similarly, 61% of consumers say clearer explanations of how the plan works, such as what's covered, out-of-pocket cost responsibilities, and available discounts, would make them more likely to enroll in vision benefits.

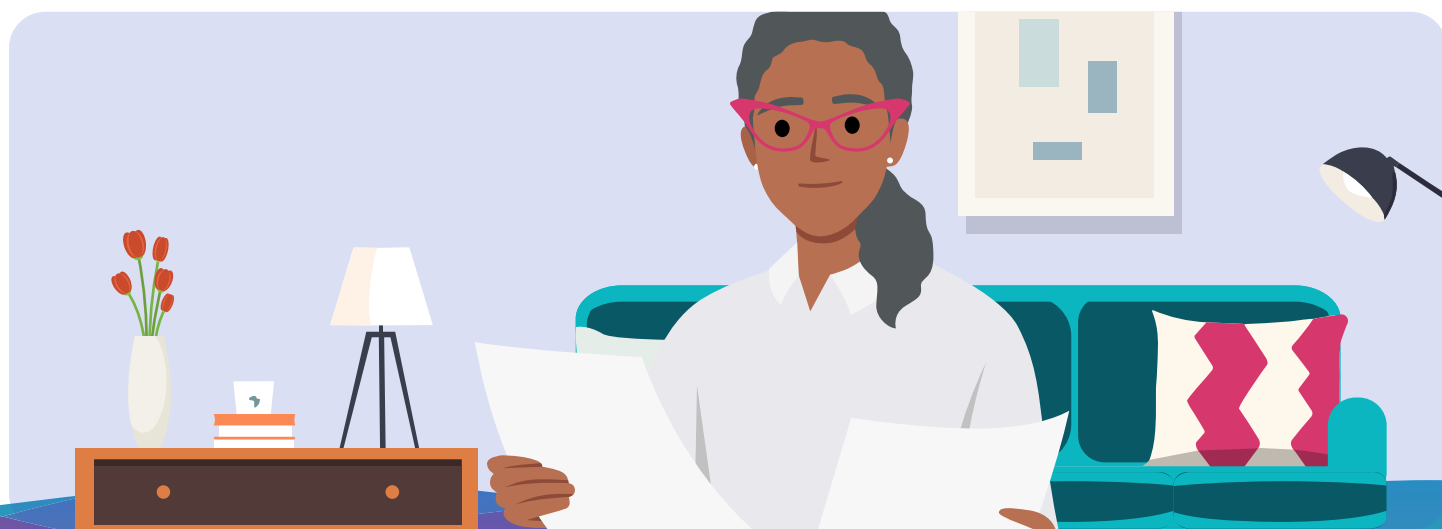
Confusion: The Enrollment Barrier



Of people offered vision benefits say the value hasn't been clearly explained or it's confusing to select the right plan



Agree clearer explanations of how the plan works would make them more likely to enroll in vision benefits



The Keys to Post-Enrollment Clarity

Even after enrolling in vision benefits, coverage confusion often persists. Fundamentally, the utilization of vision benefits comes down to practical concerns. The member's vision plan is a primary consideration when choosing an eye care provider and purchasing eyewear, with "accepts my insurance" as the leading criterion for both decisions.

However, while many people understand the basics of their coverage, they report struggling with the plan details. The uncertainty and concerns about "hidden costs" create hesitation about using the benefits.

Addressing broader eye health education can help overcome member uncertainty and drive greater benefit utilization. Four in five people enrolled in vision benefits say they would be more likely to use their benefits if they received more information from their workplaces and vision plan administrators about managing eye health or the connection between vision and overall well-being.

Vision carriers are credible sources of information. Seventy-five percent of people say they're likely to seek advice about eye health from vision or health care carriers. The number rises to 80% among people of color, who are also significantly more interested in learning how to manage their eye health and how excessive screen time affects their eyes.

Communications Activate Utilization



4 in 5

People say they would be more likely to use their vision benefits if they received more information about managing eye health and the connection to overall well-being.



In-the-Moment Engagement

Needing new glasses or contacts is still a primary reason why consumers seek vision care. That means the experience — from exam to eyewear selection — plays a pivotal role in the proactive management of their eye health.

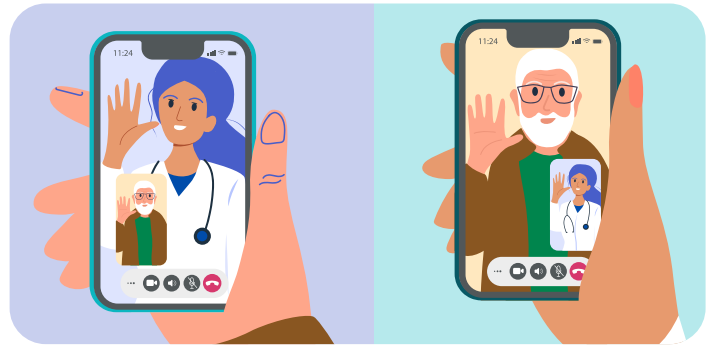
Offering choice is essential for most vision benefit members, with 57% citing a wider selection of covered frames and lenses as a top reason to use their vision benefits more in the future. Choice also influences provider selection, with one-third of consumers emphasizing the importance of frame variety, brand availability, and advanced lens options when selecting an eyewear provider.

Technology is also an emerging factor in consumer engagement. Fifty-four percent say coverage for more advanced technologies, like smart glasses and blue light filtering lenses, would be a reason to use their benefits. Among Gen Z not currently enrolled in vision benefits, digital innovations serve as potential motivators for buying or enrolling in vision care benefits in the future, with 51% interested in digital eye tracking, 50% drawn to personalized recommendations, and 54% attracted to virtual eye care options.

Vision Forward: Transforming Challenges into Opportunities

Take another look around the coffee shop, living room, or office at everyone glued to their screens. It's more than a snapshot of modern life, it's an invitation to expand awareness and reimagine the proactive management of eye health.

The path forward is closer than it appears. Emphasizing the connection between eye health and overall well-being can help fuel member engagement, improve vision health outcomes, and boost the utilization of vision benefits.



Turn Insights into Increased Engagement – and Better Outcomes

A steady drumbeat of intuitive, just-in-time communications can play a critical role in compelling consumers to take control of their eye health.

1. Give vision benefits the credit they deserve.

The comprehensive eye exam is a powerful health screening tool that goes far beyond vision correction. Whether you're an HR decision-maker helping employees prepare for open enrollment or an optometrist advising a patient at their annual exam, you can play a critical role in helping members see vision benefits as a core part of managing their holistic health, not just a nice-to-have add-on when they need glasses or contacts.

Provider Guidance: Beyond the Eye Test

- 75% want advice on how nutrition can improve eye health
- 76% want to learn eye care tips for elderly family members
- 86% of parents want healthy eye care advice for children

2. Make it easy for members to take action.

A member's future eye health is not a foregone conclusion. There are many ways people can improve their vision health trajectory through simple lifestyle edits. Offer information and practical tips by highlighting topics like minimizing digital eye strain, the role of nutrition and exercise in eye health outcomes, and insights about underlying demographic risk factors through wellness webinars, social media posts, newsletter blurbs, and other member communication channels.

3. Set clear expectations.

People value what they understand. Confusion about what's covered, and where, can create a strong barrier to seeking vision care. Focus on creating straightforward communications that explain what to expect, what's covered (and what's not), and provide easy-to-access resources to help members optimize their coverage. In addition to year-round on-demand materials, tap into seasonal periods when interest in vision benefits tends to tick up, such as the first few months of the year when benefits reset, back-to-school when kids need updated exam records and prescription renewals, and the year-end benefits utilization rush.

Explain to Engage

83% of consumers say clear, step-by-step explanations of what to expect during an eye exam would make them more likely to make an appointment.

4. Demonstrate value.

Nobody likes hidden costs. Offer interactive tools to help members estimate the costs of exams and eyewear features. When people understand the costs and the discounts available, they are better able to see the high value of vision benefits relative to the price.

5. Make convenience clear.

Communications that emphasize ease and access options for care help reduce consumer stress and procrastination. Wherever vision solutions are highlighted, embed quick links to provider locator tools so members can easily punch in their address and see just how quickly they can book an appointment nearby. And don't forget online options – many members can access telehealth, appointment bookings, online Rx renewals, and frame shopping solutions from the comfort of their living room.

6. Lean into the cool factor.

Technology, innovation, and eyewear styles can change how people think about eye care. Look for opportunities to make vision care exciting and relevant, especially for younger generations. Highlight emerging technologies such as AI-enabled frames, online acuity testing, virtual try-on tools, and the ongoing evolution of photochromic lens products.

About Versant Health

Versant Health, Inc., part of the MetLife family of companies, is one of the nation's leading administrators of managed vision care, serving 35 million of our client's members nationwide. Our purpose is to make healthy vision a reality for everyone by improving access to care and education in the communities we serve. Fueled by our mission to improve members' lives with easy-to-use vision solutions rooted in choice, value, and care, Versant Health believes that everyone has the power to become anything they set their sights on. Contact your Versant Health representative for more information about our products and services.

VersantHealth.com

About STRAT7

STRAT7 is a global strategy, insight and analytics group with a focus on delivering game-changing commercial impact. Since our inception, we've worked collaboratively with leading companies to help define opportunities for brands, categories, and businesses. Our expertise spans not only Financial Services, but also Food and Drink, Beauty, Healthcare, Telecoms, Technology, Entertainment, and Travel. Our programs and client relationships span all continents, with >50% of our work originating in the US.

Strat7.com

About the Research

Versant Health's 4th Annual Vision Wellness Study (2025) is based on data gathered from employees and employers, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative components:

1. The quantitative study was based on an extensive sample size of 3,045 U.S. adults aged 18 or older. Respondents had to at least share responsibility for health care decisions or be the primary decision-maker in their household. The survey captured numerous datapoints related to demographic information including age, gender, ethnicity, geographic location, employment status, occupation, and household income. Some weighting was applied to ensure representativeness and consistency with Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data. Weights were applied to age, gender, geographic location, and employment status.
2. The quantitative data was supplemented by 42 interviews across a variety of audiences, including US consumers (including people enrolled in vision care benefits and those who were not), eye care professionals, employee benefits brokers, health plan executives, and HR decision-makers in small, mid-size, and large businesses.

The surveys, interviews and analysis were conducted by STRAT7, a global strategy, insights, and analytics consultancy, in partnership with Versant Health.

All data from Versant Health's 4th Annual Vision Wellness Study unless otherwise noted.

- 1 World Report on Vision, World Health Organization. 2019.
- 2 Bullimore MA, Brennan NA. The underestimated role of myopia in uncorrectable visual impairment in the United States. Sci Rep. 2023;13(1):15283. Published 2023 Sep 15. doi:10.1038/s41598-023-42108-y.
- 3 Myopia Increasing in the U.S. Population, National Eye Institute, February 2010.
- 4 Faster Myopia Progression Seen in Younger Children, Especially Girls, Review of Optometry, December 2023.
- 5 Looking Ahead: Improving Our Vision for the Future, Centers for Disease Control (CDC), May 2024.
- 6 Systemic Conditions with Ocular and Visual Manifestations, American Optometric Association, December 2014.

