

# Members who are blind or have low vision

Whether a life-long condition or a gradual onset associated with aging, being blind or having low or loss of vision can pose challenges for some, or is simply a way of life for others. Understanding it from a professional perspective is helpful to the patient in treatment, particularly if they are legally blind with vision worse than 20/200, or have a total loss of vision that cannot be corrected with glasses or contact lenses. It is important to ensure that SWH members who are blind or have low vision have access to their healthcare provider, as well as access to procedures, pharmacy and health education information to maintain optimal health.

Information provided in this brochure will explain how to get information in alternate formats such as Braille, Large Font, Audio or other formats that our members can use.

**The American Foundation for the Blind estimates that 10 million people in the US are blind or have low vision.**

## LEADING CAUSES OF VISION LOSS

There are many conditions and diseases that can cause blindness or a reduction of vision, such as injuries to the surface of the eye, accidents, or other injuries. Here are four of the most common:

### Cataracts:

The lens of the eye is a clear structure made up mostly of proteins and water, and enables us to focus clearly on objects up close and far away. The clouding of the lens, generally age related, is a clumping of proteins in the eye, and impairs the eye to process those images.

### Diabetic Eye Disease:

Diabetic Retinopathy is the most common eye disease associated with diabetes, and is usually caused by the swelling of blood vessels in the eye that may leak fluid or blood into the inside of the eye, effecting the ability of the retina (the light sensitive tissue in the back of the eye) to process light and images. Over time, Diabetic Retinopathy can progress and ultimately lead to blindness.

### Glaucoma:

The optic nerve, which is a bundle of 1 million nerve fibers that connects the retina to the brain, can be damaged by a group of diseases, leading to glaucoma, vision loss, and blindness. Without treatment, patients will experience a loss of peripheral vision, which can develop in one or both eyes.



## AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION (AMD):

There are two types of Macular Degeneration – wet and dry. However the wet version is by far more serious than the dry version, and can cause a loss of central vision. Wet AMD is caused when blood vessels begin to grow on the outside of the back of the eye(s), which can leak fluid or blood, damaging the macula. In most people, the dry version usually does not cause loss of vision or other symptoms.

Other causes of vision loss are blocked blood vessels, complications of premature birth, complications of eye surgery, lazy eye, optic neuritis, stroke, retinitis pigmentosa and tumors such as retinoblastoma and optic glioma.



## How you can provide accommodations for members who are blind or who have low vision

- Provide assistance to members to fill out forms with medical history and insurance information. Don't assume a companion will help them.
- Provide a confidential setting to fill out the forms.
- Allow service animals to go with them.
- Explain what doctors and nurses are doing during a procedure. Keep them informed of what is happening in the room.
- Let the members know SWH may be able to provide transportation to their medical appointments at no cost.
- Provide structural accessibility to members who may use a white cane or a service animal. Keep the path of travel clear from the entrance of the building to the physician's office.
- Call the member's pharmacy to ensure they can provide drug information labeling in the format that works best for them.
- Let members know that SWH will provide any healthcare related information they need in an alternate format, i.e. Braille, Large Font, or Audio at no cost to them.

The availability of accessible medical services, medical forms and prescription drugs in alternate formats plays a vital role in the lives of people with disabilities. It is our goal to improve member's health and wellness by ensuring communication access for providers and members.

## Requesting Material in an alternate/accessible format

Standard print may be unreadable for many reasons. A person who is blind may prefer material in audio or Braille. Someone with low vision may prefer material in a larger font size. To request materials for SWH members in alternate formats please call the SWH Member and Provider Contact Center.

## Requesting an interpreter for members who are Deaf/Blind

A member who is Deaf/Blind may need an interpreter. Interpreter services for medical appointments are a covered benefit for our members in most states. Please call the Member and Provider Contact Center for more information.

If you have additional questions or require more information, please contact your respective county Provider Services Representative.

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