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One in four unaware an eye test could save their sight

New research from Action for Blind People shows that many people in Great Britain are unaware an eye test could prevent them from going blind, and are risking their sight by not going for regular eye tests. The national visual impairment charity commissioned a survey of over 2,000 people in Great Britain on their habits and attitudes towards eye tests. The survey, conducted by YouGov, has shown that:

- **1 in 4 adults (27%) didn't know that an eye test could prevent them from losing their sight**
- **1 in 10 adults (11%) couldn't answer when asked what the purpose of an eye test was - young people aged 18-24 were the most likely not to be able to answer this question (17% compared to 11% nationally).**
- **1 in 4 adults (27%) hadn't had an eye test in the last two years.**

Richard Tolson, Health and Social Care Service Development Manager for Action for Blind People, comments: "It's shocking that so many people are unaware an eye test could potentially be the difference between having sight and going blind. As well as detecting problems which can be corrected with glasses or contact lenses, an eye test can identify serious eye conditions such as glaucoma.

"Action for Blind People is encouraging people to protect themselves against sight loss by getting their eyes tested every two years - unless advised otherwise by their

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optician. Don't wait to notice something is wrong before going for an eye test - by then it could be too late!"

When asked what the purpose of an eye test was, less than half of all adults (49%) stated that an eye test was to check the health of the eyes or for diseases, problems and infections.

Over half of all sight loss is due to preventable or treatable causes. With an estimated two million blind and partially sighted people living in the UK, this means that a million people are currently living with sight loss that could have been prevented. In the early stages of many eye conditions there may be no symptoms or changes in a person's vision. An eye test is a full health check for the eyes and can potentially save a person's sight by picking up eye problems early, allowing time to control or treat the condition.

Eye tests can also highlight general health problems such as diabetes or high blood pressure. In some circumstances an eye test can pick up life threatening conditions. Jayne (aged 39) owes her life to a simple eye test. Jayne says:

"The optician detected that I had a larger than normal blind spot (we all have a blind spot) and referred me on for a brain scan. The scan showed that I had a malformed artery which could have burst at any point. I couldn't live with a time bomb that could go off at any point. I underwent a number of operations which despite leaving me partially sighted, have essentially saved my life."

Nearly a third (30%) of adults who hadn't been for an eye test in the last two years hadn't got tested because they believe it's expensive.

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Richard Tolson continues: “This simply isn’t true. An eye test costs around £24 on average so if you get tested every two years, you are talking about £1 a month to protect your sight. Many people are entitled to free eye tests, for example, if someone uses a computer for a significant part of his or her work – and our survey showed that 49% of people in Great Britain do – that person has a legal right to an eye test paid for by their employer. The cost of an eye test is a small price to pay compared to the devastating cost of losing your sight.”

Health Minister, Ann Keen, added:

“Many people lose their sight unnecessarily when a trip to the optician could have prevented the problem. The good news is that the vast majority of sight problems can be treated or managed if caught early enough. Free NHS funded sight tests are available for: children under 16 and for young people between 16 and 18 in full time education; people aged 60 and over; those with diabetes or glaucoma or at risk of glaucoma; people on a low income; or those requiring complex lenses or registered as blind or partially sighted.”

-Ends-

For further media information please contact Zoë Patel, in Action’s press office on 020 7635 4898 or 07739 819954 or email: zoe.patel@actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Regional statistics are available from the press office as are photographs of the actress, Honor Blackman, having her eyes tested in support of the campaign.

Notes to editors:

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- Action for Blind People is an expert national organisation, ensuring blind and partially sighted people get practical support in all aspects of their lives. Contact Action for Blind People's National Freephone Helpline on 0800 915 4666 or www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk
- Action for Blind People is breaking down barriers that prevent visually impaired people from achieving the same opportunities as sighted people.
- If abbreviating "Action for Blind People", please use "Action" rather than AFBP or ABP.
- All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,350 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 22nd - 27th May 2008. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).