

President's Message

Dear Friends and Supporters of Vision Research,

As we look back on 2024, I am incredibly proud of the pivotal work achieved by the National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (NAEVR) and the Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (AEVR), in collaboration with our valued partners. Together, we have championed vision research, advocating tirelessly to ensure the National Eye Institute (NEI) remains a dedicated institute within NIH. Our collective efforts have kept NEI at the forefront of advancing treatments and developing cures for blinding eye diseases, safeguarding the future of vision health for millions.

As we look ahead to 2025, challenges to medical research funding and renewed efforts to consolidate NIH institutes jeopardize the momentum we've built and risk reversing the progress made by the vision community. These threats highlight the very reason NAEVR and AEVR were established—to lead and unify the voice for vision research, protecting the funding and resources critical to advancing this essential work. By safeguarding these investments, we can continue to improve treatments and outcomes for those affected by vision impairment and vision loss.

Thanks to your dedicated support, the Alliances have successfully educated policymakers on the importance of federal funding for the NEI, raised awareness about the value of vision research, and emphasized why NEI must remain a dedicated institute. Now, more than ever, we need your partnership to safeguard our progress and defend against threats to the future of eye and vision research.

To those who supported the Alliances in 2024—thank you. Your contributions were essential as we faced unprecedented challenges, including proposals to

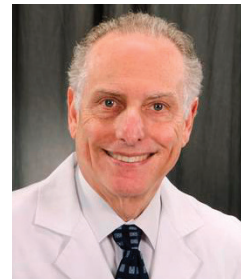
consolidate the NEI. As we enter a pivotal year, I urge you to continue your support in 2025. If you are reading this contributor report and are not yet a member of the Alliances, we invite you to join us. Your contributions enable the Alliances to advocate effectively and work with policymakers to ensure NEI remains a strong, independent institute dedicated to advancing vision research.

NAEVR and AEVR were created for moments like this—to protect, advocate, and champion the research that improves millions of lives. Together, we can ensure NEI thrives and that vision research remains a national priority. Thank you for standing with us. We look forward to continuing this crucial work together in 2025.

Sincerely,

Steven Feldon, MD, MBA

President, Board of Directors
National Alliance for Eye and
Vision Research/Alliance for
Eye and Vision Research



To learn more about how to support our mission and help protect the future of vision research, email our Executive Director at dan@eyerresearch.org. Your partnership is vital to sustaining our efforts and ensuring that vision research continues to thrive.

Follow us on social!



Stay updated on the latest news, events, and advocacy efforts! Follow us on LinkedIn, X, and Facebook. Don't miss out on valuable insights and opportunities to support vision research and eye health.



Legislative Update

Congressional Action and the Road Ahead for Vision Research

As 2024 draws to a close, the future of federal funding for medical research, including vision research, hangs in the balance. In September, Congress passed a continuing resolution (CR), extending federal funding through December 20, 2024, and preventing a government shutdown. This temporary measure maintains funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and preserves the National Eye Institute (NEI) as a standalone institute at FY24 levels. However, discussions about consolidating NEI into a larger neuroscience-focused institute remain active, particularly among Republican lawmakers. With another CR

likely to extend funding into spring 2025, uncertainty continues to loom over new appropriations and research initiatives

Relying on short-term CRs impacts the ability of NIH and NEI to start new research projects and sustain long-term initiatives. Without a finalized budget, progress could stall, and opportunities for groundbreaking discoveries may be delayed.

2024 Elections: Shifting Policy Landscape

The results of the 2024 elections signal a potential shift in federal policy. With Republicans controlling Congress and the administration, proposals to cut federal

	FY21 Final	FY22 Final	FY23 Final	FY24 Final	FY25 NAEVR Request	FY25 President's Budget	FY25 House Budget	FY25 Senate Budget
NIH	\$42.93 B +3%	\$44.96 B +4.72%	\$47.46 B +5.6%	\$47.08 B -0.8%	\$51.3 B +9.0% Over FY2023	\$50.1 B +6.4% Over FY24	\$48.6 B +3.2% Over FY24	\$48.8 B +3.7% Over FY24
NEI	\$835.71 M +1.4%	\$863.9 M +3.4%	\$896.55 M +3.8%	\$896.55 M +0%	\$1B +11.5% Over FY2024	\$898.82 M +0.3% Over FY2024	Level funded but proposed consolidation into a new Institute on Neuroscience and Brain Research	\$896.55 M +0% Over FY2024
DOD VRP	\$20 M +0%	\$20 M +0%	\$20 M +0%	\$20 M +0%	\$30 M +50%	N/A	\$20 M +0%	N/A

- The FY23 budget included funding for ARPA-H within NIH at \$1.5 B and was level-funded in FY24. The FY25 Senate Bill includes level funding at \$1.5 B, the House bill reduces ARPA-H to \$500 M
- The Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 (Debt Ceiling Agreement) put caps on federal spending for FY24 and FY25
- The Senate bill restores funding to the BRAIN Initiative in the amount of \$359 M, comparable to the FY23 level prior to the expiration of funding in the 21st Century Cures Act

Congressional Hearing on NIH Funding and Reform

On November 19, the House Labor, Health and Human Services (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittee conducted a hearing with NIH Director Dr. Monica Bertagnolli to discuss operations and funding priorities. The subcommittee is responsible for setting the funding levels for federal health agencies, including the NIH. During the hearing, subcommittee members raised questions about accountability, transparency, and potential structural reforms and emphasized an interest in blocking funding to some foreign countries. Concerns were raised on the perceived duplication of efforts across NIH's 27 institutes, and whether structural reforms including consolidation could streamline operations and enhance research data sharing.

Dr. Bertagnolli emphasized the critical and unique missions of each NIH institute. She also spoke about NIH's ongoing efforts to rebuild public trust and ensure taxpayer funds are managed effectively. She expressed her willingness to continue dialogue with the committee that initiate reforms to accomplish goals while ensuring research priorities are maintained.

The hearing reflected a mix of partisan and bipartisan perspectives—some members advocated for structural



reforms as part of a broader effort to improve efficiency and accountability, while others stressed the importance of stakeholder engagement in any proposed changes. There was consensus among many on the need for a bipartisan approach to NIH reforms, suggesting that structural changes include input from researchers, patient advocacy groups, and other stakeholders.

In summary, the hearing underscored the increasing focus on NIH by Congress, particularly within the context of funding and organizational structure, and highlighted the importance of maintaining engagement with policymakers to advocate for NEI's status as a dedicated institute and dedicated funding for vision.

spending and restructure NIH may re-emerge. The first Trump administration proposed significant NIH budget cuts, though Congress ultimately rejected them. President-elect Trump's recent comments about "restoring the institute to the gold standard" and his nomination of Dr. Jay Bhattacharya suggest a renewed focus on pandemic-related policies and broader NIH reforms.

Advocacy: The Vision Research Community Responds

In 2024, NAEVR coordinated advocacy initiatives throughout the summer to support NEI and NIH funding. Over 100 organizations signed a collective letter to Congress, underscoring the importance of sustained investment in vision research and maintaining the NEI as a dedicated institute. Additionally, more than 5,200 advocacy letters have been sent to congressional offices, urging lawmakers to prioritize NEI and NIH funding in appropriations decisions.

Looking Ahead to 2025

NAEVR remains committed to monitoring legislative developments and defending NEI's autonomy. The coming year will be pivotal, with continued advocacy focused on preserving dedicated funding for vision research. Engaging

with policymakers, partners, and stakeholders will be essential to safeguard the progress made and ensure that vision research remains a national priority.

Your support and active participation are more critical than ever. Together, we can ensure that NEI continues to lead the way in advancing treatments, cures, and innovations for vision health.

“ In the face of ongoing funding uncertainty and proposals to consolidate the National Eye Institute, our mission remains clear: to protect and advocate for vision research. Now more than ever, we must stand together to ensure NEI remains a dedicated institute, advancing treatments and cures that millions rely on.”

Dan Ignaszewski
Executive Director, NAEVR/AEVR

Celebrating the Success of the 2024 AEVR Emerging Vision Scientist Program

The Alliance for Eye and Vision Research (AEVR) proudly hosted the 2024 Emerging Vision Scientists Program, bringing together 22 of the nation's most promising early-career vision researchers to Washington, D.C., for an impactful and inspiring two-day advocacy and networking event. This year's program, held from September 16–17, marked a tremendous success, showcasing the importance of educating policymakers about the role of federally funded vision research in improving lives, driving innovation, and contributing to the economy.

A Program with Purpose and Impact

The Emerging Vision Scientist Program, generously sponsored by the Research to Prevent Blindness, was established to provide early-career vision scientists with a platform to advocate for vision research funding and

“

The Emerging Vision Scientist Program has provided me with the opportunity to learn how to translate scientific terminology into laymen language. The training has given me the power to communicate the significance of my work effectively, whether I'm speaking to policymakers, potential funders, or the general public. This skill is crucial not only for advancing my career but also for advocating for the importance of vision research and its impact on people's lives.”

*Pratheepa Rasiah Ph.D
Research Assistant Professor
Department of Biomedical Engineering
Vanderbilt University*

gain valuable professional development skills. This year's cohort of scientists came from diverse academic institutions across the country, representing various sub-specialties within vision science, including retinal disease, glaucoma, myopia, diabetic retinopathy, and regenerative therapies.

Highlights from the Program

Hill Day: Amplifying the Voice of Vision Research

A cornerstone of the program was Hill Day, where participants engaged in nearly 50 meetings with members of Congress and their staff. Armed with compelling personal stories, impactful data, and evidence-based talking points, these scientists underscored the critical importance of continued and increased funding for the National Eye Institute (NEI) within the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

- **Key Topics Discussed:** The need for robust funding for the NIH and NEI, opposition to the NIH Reform Proposal that threatens the NEI's autonomy, and the economic benefits of federal investments in eye and vision research.
- **Engagement Highlights:** Many participants reported their first-ever meetings with Congressional offices, emphasizing the value of their personal narratives and research to legislators who directly influence funding decisions.

Poster Session

The program included an engaging poster session, held in the Rayburn House Office Building. Here, researchers showcased their cutting-edge work to Congressional staff, policymakers, and advocates. The event facilitated dynamic discussions about how vision research is paving the way for breakthroughs that improve quality of life, reduce healthcare costs, and drive economic productivity.

The poster session drew over 120 attendees, including staff from key Congressional committees and advocacy groups. Posters ranged from innovations in gene therapy for inherited retinal diseases to the development of neuroprotective strategies for glaucoma.



2024 Emerging Vision Scientist Graduates

Inas Aboobakar, MD
Ophthalmology Instructor
Massachusetts Eye and Ear,
Harvard Medical School

Juan Angueyra, MD, PhD
Assistant Professor, Department of
Biology & Brain and Behavior Institute
University of Maryland

Seema Banerjee, PhD
Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Wilmer Eye Institute
The Johns Hopkins University

Sujoy Bhattacharya, PhD
Research Assistant Professor
Vanderbilt University Medical Center/
Vanderbilt Eye Institute

Yuyan Cheng, PhD
Assistant Professor, Department of
Ophthalmology
University of Pennsylvania

Maura Di Nicola, MD
Assistant Professor of Clinical
Ophthalmology
Bascom Palmer Eye Institute

Andrew Feola, PhD
Assistant Professor/Research Biologist
Emory University/Atlanta VA Medical
Center

Arthur Fernandes, PhD, MPH
Postdoctoral Research Associate
University of Calgary

Nina Sara Fraticelli-Guzman
PhD Student
Georgia Institute of Technology

Gustavo Rosa Gameiro, MD, PhD
Research Fellow
Bascom Palmer Eye Institute

Daniel Hass, PhD
Postdoctoral Fellow
University of Washington

Kimberly Hreha, EdD, OTR/L
Assistant Professor
Duke University

Elmira Jalilian, PhD
Assistant Professor
Department of Ophthalmology and
Visual Sciences/University of Illinois at
Chicago

Sangeetha Kandoi, PhD
Postdoctoral Scholar (BrightFocus
Macular Degeneration Fellow)
Wilmer Eye Institute
The Johns Hopkins University

Levi Kanu, MD
Clinician Investigator, Ophthalmology
Instructor
Massachusetts Eye and Ear,
Harvard Medical School

Shruthi Karnam, PhD, MSc
Postdoctoral Scholar
University of California Berkeley,
Herbert Wertheim School of Optometry
& Vision Science

Casey Keuthan, PhD
Postdoctoral Fellow
Wilmer Eye Institute,
The Johns Hopkins University

Mahmoud KhalafAllah, MD, MSc
Ophthalmologist
The University of Alabama at
Birmingham

Xiao Lin, MD, PhD
Postdoctoral Associate
Department of Ophthalmology
Baylor College of Medicine

Eric Lovett, Jr., MBA
Medical Student
Jacobs School of Medicine and
Biomedical Sciences
University at Buffalo

Anbukkarasi Muniyandi, PhD, MSc
Senior Research Scientist
University of California San Francisco

Tanu Parmar, PhD
Senior Research Associate
Albert Eye Research Institute, Duke
Ophthalmology, Duke University
School of Medicine

Chandrashekar Patil, PhD
Research Assistant Professor
Department of Ophthalmology and
Visual Sciences/University of Illinois at
Chicago

Cornelia Peterson, DVM, PhD, DACVP
Assistant Professor of Anatomic
Pathology, Department of Comparative
Pathobiology
Tufts University, Cummings School of
Veterinary Medicine

Lev Prasov, MD, PhD
Assistant Professor
University of Michigan

Rithambara Ramachandran, MD, MSc
Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology,
Glaucoma Specialist
University of Pennsylvania

Pratheepa Rasiah, PhD
Research Assistant Professor,
Department of Biomedical Engineering
Vanderbilt University

Travis Redd, MD, MPH
Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology
Casey Eye Institute, Oregon Health &
Science University

Michael Risner, PhD, MA
Assistant Professor of Foundational
Medical Studies
Oakland University William Beaumont
School of Medicine

Peng Shang, PhD
Scientist
Doheny Eye Institute

Raji Shyam, PhD
Assistant Professor
Indiana University Bloomington,
School of Optometry

Sukhvinder Singh, PhD, MSc
Research Scientist
Wayne State University

Rose Tan, MD, PhD
Research Associate, Faculty
Wilmer Eye Institute,
The Johns Hopkins University

Jungeun Jenny Won, PhD
Assistant Professor of Research
State University of New York at Buffalo

Vision Forward: The National Eye Institute Congressional Briefing

On September 16, we hosted an impactful Congressional Briefing focused on the “Importance of the National Eye Institute in Advancing Vision Research and Preventing Blindness.” The event coincided with our Emerging Vision Scientists Program and brought together leading researchers, policymakers, and advocates to highlight the NEI’s essential role in driving innovation and addressing the needs of millions of Americans facing vision loss. This year’s briefing underscored the vital role of the NEI as a leader in vision research and its direct impact on millions of Americans facing visual impairments and blindness. The briefing brought together researchers, advocates, policymakers, and stakeholders to discuss the future of vision science and federal funding for the NEI.

The briefing began with a warm welcome from Dan Ignaszewski, AEVR’s Executive Director, who introduced the session by highlighting NEI’s role as the nation’s primary federal agency supporting vision research. Dr. Michael Chiang, Director of the NEI, delivered an inspiring keynote address, emphasizing NEI’s commitment to advancing innovative treatments for blinding eye diseases and supporting early-career researchers like those in the Emerging Vision Scientist Program.

Dr. Chiang’s also highlighted the transformative impact of Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) and the role of big data in advancing vision research. He described how OCT technology—which allows for high-resolution, cross-sectional imaging of the retina—has revolutionized the diagnosis and management of numerous eye diseases, such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD), diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma. He emphasized how OCT has become a gold standard for clinicians, enabling earlier detection, more accurate diagnoses, and personalized treatment plans that can prevent vision loss.

Furthermore, Dr. Chiang underscored the critical role of big data and artificial intelligence (AI) in enhancing the power of OCT. By analyzing massive datasets of OCT images, researchers can now identify subtle patterns and trends that might otherwise be missed. This synergy between imaging and data science is paving the way for more efficient and accurate diagnostics, predictive models, and novel therapeutic approaches.

Data sharing was another key theme of Dr. Chiang’s



Dr. Michael Chiang, Director of The National Eye Institute

remarks. He stressed that for these breakthroughs to continue, it is essential for scientists, institutions, and policymakers to support open data-sharing practices. Collaborative access to large datasets accelerates discovery, fosters innovation, and ensures that vision research benefits patients more rapidly.

Dr. Kapil Bharti, Scientific Director at NEI, followed Dr. Chiang with a compelling presentation on cutting-edge research being done within the Bethesda, Md. campus. Dr. Bharti mentioned that NEI’s workforce has 21 principal investigators nearly 220 staff, including both Federal and contract members. Their cornerstone is the NEI’s training program, comprised currently of 117 trainees, and is unique in that it covers both the basic science of vision research all the way to clinical application of vision research.

This included a focus on regenerative medicine and stem cell therapies for vision restoration. Dr. Bharti highlighted the transformative potential of induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) in treating retinal degenerative diseases such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD). He discussed NEI’s groundbreaking clinical trials using iPSC-derived retinal pigment epithelial cells to restore vision and prevent further deterioration in patients with AMD.

Didn’t get a chance to attend the briefing? No problem! You can still catch up on the insightful discussions and key takeaways. Scan the QR code below to watch the full event.



Dr. Kapil Bharti, Scientific Director, The National Eye Institute



Congressional Briefing, The National Eye Institute

Sincere Gratitude to Our Sponsors





Highlights from our Thyroid Eye Disease Congressional Briefing

On November 21, we hosted a highly informative Congressional Briefing on Thyroid Eye Disease (TED) during Prevent Blindness' 5th Annual TED Awareness Week.

The briefing featured a presentation from leading research expert, Collynn Woeller, Ph.D. Dr. Woeller is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Ophthalmology, with secondary appointments in Environmental Medicine and the Center for Visual Science at the University of Rochester.

His earlier research contributions include studies on mitochondrial stress responses, metabolic compartmentation of nucleotide biosynthesis, and regulatory elements in metabolism. This work laid the foundation for Dr. Woeller's current research program, which focuses on elucidating molecular and cellular pathways in ocular diseases, with particular emphasis on TED. His lab, which is funded by NEI and Prevent Blindness, investigates the interplay between inflammation, fibrosis, and tissue remodeling in TED, with the goal

of understanding disease mechanisms at the cellular and molecular levels to develop novel therapeutic approaches.

Patient advocate, Nathaniel Jellinek, MD, FAAD, FACMS, shared his personal journey with TED. He described the challenges of enduring high-dose oral steroids, a ten-week course of IV steroid infusions, and the struggle to get insurance approval for a second course of Teprotumumab. Dr. Jellinek's story underscored the importance of protecting access to effective treatments and the need for continued research to improve patient outcomes.

The briefing highlighted the power of advocacy, importance of research funding, and ongoing need to support those affected by TED. We remain committed to raising awareness and ensuring that federal support for vision research continues to drive progress and innovation.

“

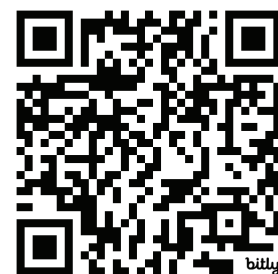
TED is a complex autoimmune condition. While significant progress has been made in understanding and treating TED, much more research is needed to fully unravel its complexities and develop better solutions for those affected.”

Collynn Woeller Ph.D
Assistant Professor
University of Rochester

Thank you to our generous sponsors!



Scan the QR code below to watch the TED Congressional Briefing



Pictured L to R: Collynn Woeller, Ph.D., Dan Ignaszewski, Dr. Nathaniel Jellinek, MD, FAAD, FACMS, Judy Hill, Olivia Perry (VHAC), and Katelyn Snider (Amgen)

Shaping the Future of Vision: Event Highlights

Over the past few months, we've had the incredible opportunity to engage in multiple inspiring events, including Mary Tyler Moore Vision Initiative's Symposium "Curing Vision Loss from Diabetes," the American Academy of Optometry Annual Academy in Indianapolis, and a fun Halloween celebration with ARVO. A highlight from this year's American Academy of Ophthalmology conference in Chicago hosting two courageous Ukrainian ophthalmologists at our first Modeling Vision Injury SIG meeting, where they shared front line insights into devastating eye trauma faced by soldiers. Finally, a huge congratulations to our Emerging Vision Scientist social media contest winners!



Myopia Congressional Briefing Summary



Pictured L to R: Dan Ignaszewski, Dr. Rupa Wong, Bridget Benard, Jeffrey Walline, OD, Ph.D., Judy Hill

On December 9, AEVR hosted an informative and timely Congressional Briefing on Myopia, featuring presentations from Dr. Jeffrey Walline, President of the American Academy of Optometry and Acting Dean at The Ohio State University College of Optometry, and Dr. Rupa Wong, Clinical Associate Professor, John A. Burns School of Medicine, University of Hawaii, Pediatric Ophthalmologist, Honolulu Eye Clinic.

Dr. Walline detailed a range of effective myopia control treatments, including soft multi-focal contact lenses, orthokeratology, atropine drops, red light therapy, and defocus incorporated multiple segments (DIMS) spectacle lenses. He emphasized the importance of combining treatments for greater

effectiveness and stressed that early intervention is critical to slowing the progression of myopia and reducing long-term risks.

Dr. Walline also stressed that axial length measurement—the physical growth of the eye—should be part of routine exams to help identify children at risk of severe myopia. Too many children are diagnosed late, when the condition is already advancing, and too few are being actively monitored.

The event also featured expert insights from Dr. Rupa Wong, Clinical Associate Professor at the John A. Burns School of Medicine, University of Hawaii, and a pediatric ophthalmologist at Honolulu Eye Clinic. This timely event shed light on the alarming rise of myopia in children and the urgent need for

more research, education, and interventions to combat this growing public health crisis.

Dr. Wong presented sobering statistics, highlighting that by 2050, 50% of the global population is projected to have myopia. She illustrated how the average age of myopia onset has shifted dramatically—from 11 years old in 1983 to just 8 years old by 2000—a trend that underscores the increasing severity of the issue. She also discussed the link between high myopia and serious complications, such as retinal detachment, where the risk is 5-6 times greater in individuals with severe myopia compared to those with lower levels of the condition.

Dr. Rupa Wong underscored that

Jeffrey Walline, OD, Ph.D

Acting Dean, The Ohio State University College of Optometry
President, American Academy of Optometry



“ Studies show that by the age of 15, children with myopia are already at a higher risk for severe vision problems later in life. Intervening with treatments like DIMS lenses or atropine drops can reduce myopia progression by up to 50%.”

Rupa Wong, MD

Clinical Associate Professor, John A. Burns School of Medicine, University of Hawaii, Pediatric Ophthalmologist, Honolulu Eye Clinic



“ Early intervention is critical in slowing myopia progression and the higher chance we have to protect children’s vision, reduce the risk of serious complications like retinal detachment, and ensure they have a lifetime of healthy sight.”

Bridget Bernard

Parent Patient Advocate



“ As a parent of two children living with myopia, I’ve seen firsthand how this condition impacts their daily lives and future. We need more awareness, research, and early intervention to give our kids the best chance at preserving their vision.”

lifestyle changes, such as spending more time outdoors and limiting screen use, play a key role in slowing myopia progression, specially for children with a family history of the condition.

As a mother of two children living with myopia, parent advocate Bridget Bernard has witnessed firsthand the challenges that come with this condition. She spoke candidly about the fact that it’s time for the medical community to recognize myopia as a serious, progressive disease and act early to protect our children’s futures. With early diagnosis and intervention, I’ve seen how we can better manage their condition and give them a fighting chance at maintaining healthy vision for years to come.

Missed the briefing? Scan the QR Code below to watch the full event.



Thank you to our generous sponsors!



NAEVR/AEVR

5515 Security Lane, Suite 500
Rockville, Maryland 20852-1606

FOUNDING PARTNERS



Association of University
Professors of Ophthalmology

Gratitude to Our Dedicated Members

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our esteemed members whose unwavering support has been instrumental in driving forward our educational, support, and advocacy initiatives. It is through your commitment and collaboration that we have been able to make significant strides in advancing vision research and promoting awareness of its critical importance.

Your ongoing contributions empower us to continue our vital work in fostering innovation, providing support to those in need, and advocating for policies that prioritize vision health. We are immensely grateful for your dedication and partnership. If you are not yet a member of our alliances, we invite you to join us in our mission. Contact us today at info@eyeresearch.org to learn more about how you can become a valued member of our community and contribute to our shared vision for a brighter future in eye and vision research.

PARTNERS

