



## **AMERICAN OPTOMETRIC ASSOCIATION POSITION STATEMENT ON EYE CARE SERVICES IN NURSING FACILITIES**

There is a newly recognized public health concern in America affecting a large majority of elderly persons living in nursing facilities. Recently published studies suggest that as high as 80% of nursing facility residents never receive eye care while an inpatient at these facilities.<sup>1,2</sup> There exists a serious lack of adequate access to eye care services for persons living in nursing facilities across the United States.

Within this ever growing segment of the aging population there is a high prevalence of ocular disease, including cataract, age-related maculopathy, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy.<sup>3</sup> The vision impairment that may result from these diseases can significantly impact the functional capacity and quality of life of these individuals. It is universally recognized that the early diagnosis and treatment of these sight threatening conditions can lead to a reduction of the risk of morbidity, mortality, and permanent vision impairment.

It is mandated by federal regulations governing the operation of long term care facilities that "each resident must receive the necessary . . . medical . . . service to attain and maintain the highest possible mental and physical functional status" and "each resident must receive and the facility must provide the necessary care and services to attain or maintain the highest practicable physical, mental, and psychological well-being."<sup>4</sup> Vision and eye health care should be an integral part of this ongoing care process.

Therefore, the American Optometric Association recommends the modification or amendment of rules and regulations that directly or indirectly restrict or encumber access to eye care services within nursing facilities.

### **REFERENCES**

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3. Whitmore, Wayne. Eye Disease in a Geriatric Nursing Home Population. *Ophthalmology*, 96(3):393-398, March 1989.
4. Requirements for Long Term Care Facilities, Federal Register, Vol 56, No. 187, Thursday, September 26, 1991, p. 48873.