Eye Health Education Position Paper
SightFirst Long Range Planning (SFLRP) Working Group
August 2008

Introduction

The mission of the Lions’ SightFirst program is to support the development of comprehensive eye care systems to fight the major causes of blindness and vision loss and care for the blind and visually impaired. The program funds high quality, sustainable projects that deliver eye care services, develop infrastructure, train personnel and/or provide rehabilitation & education in underserved communities.

In 1991, the U.S. National Eye Institute (NEI), with grant support from SightFirst, conducted a survey to assess the American public’s knowledge, attitudes and practices towards eye health and disease. The survey findings prompted NEI to launch the National Eye Health Education Program (NEHEP), which translates the findings of vision research into public education initiatives. NEHEP messages are disseminated through an extensive network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including Lions through the Lions Eye Health Program (LEHP).

LEHP is a community-based eye health education program that aims to prevent vision loss by promoting early detection and timely treatment of eye diseases like glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy. Because the program encourages people to visit an eye care professional, it is most appropriate for communities with a strong eye care system already in place. For this reason, LEHP has been the primary SightFirst activity for Lions from developed countries. With support from Campaign SightFirst II, Lions can continue to promote eye health and disease prevention.

This paper, prepared as part of a long range planning effort mandated by the SightFirst Advisory Committee (SAC), recommends strategies to guide future SightFirst eye health education programming.

SightFirst & Eye Health Education

United States

Following the launch of NEHEP in the early 1990s, LCIF developed a LEHP toolkit - with videos, brochures and sample presentations – and held numerous training sessions to help orient Lions with the LEHP messages and outreach strategies. In 1994, a SightFirst grant was approved to pilot LEHP in Multiple District 22 (Maryland, Delaware and Washington, D.C.), after which, the program was launched in 33 additional states.
In 2005, with support from Eli Lilly and Allergan, the U.S. LEHP materials were updated, in content and design, and expanded to include a CD-ROM toolkit and LEHP web site. At this same time, the NEI and LCIF again collaborated and co-sponsored the 2005 Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Survey Regarding Eye Health and Diseases. The final KAP report was officially released in March 2008 and the three key recommendations are:

- Implement an educational effort to increase the awareness about the asymptomatic nature of eye disease and the importance of early detection and treatment.

- Implement a culturally appropriate educational effort for Hispanics to increase awareness about eye diseases for which they are at higher risk.

- Provide information to increase the awareness of the need for regular comprehensive dilated eye examinations for all adults (especially people at higher risk for eye diseases) to primary care providers, and other people who typically serve as gatekeepers for medical care.

Today, there are a few U.S. districts that maintain formal LEHP initiatives with ongoing outreach activities. Instead, most Lions prefer to use the materials for distribution at various community events and through their local networks. Lions’ recent requests to LCIF have been for materials that are not available through LEHP, like those regarding age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and low vision. Administrative support for the U.S. LEHP initiative, including distribution of materials and maintenance of the web site, continues to be provided by the LCIF Sight Programs Department in Oak Brook.

Expansion

Following implementation in the U.S., SightFirst grants were later awarded to Lions from the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, Canada and Turkey to help develop their national LEHP initiatives. The Australian program, in particular, has been successful in sustaining Lions’ involvement and the public’s interest for several years. They credit their success to:

- their program management infrastructure - including a part-time LEHP coordinator, state and national LEHP committees, LEHP chairpersons in each district and a strong technical partner (Centre for Eye Research Australia);

- a wide-range of materials & formats – including brochures in five different languages, event displays, training DVDs and a LEHP website;

- regular events used to engage the public and recognize successful Lions clubs and;

- sustainable financial support beyond the initial SightFirst grant - the Lions leadership in Australia approved a $4/Lion/year levy to support personnel, materials and events.
In recent years, there has been limited interest in expanding LEHP to other developed countries. Lions involved with traditional SightFirst projects in developing countries, however, regularly inquire about the availability of eye health education materials for their projects.

**SFLRP Working Group Recommendations**

In April 2008, the SFLRP Working Group convened a meeting with eye health education experts to discuss current trends related to eye health education and informally analyze LEHP-related efforts to date. The meeting included PIP Clement Kusiak, Dr. R. Pararajasegaram, IAPB Affiliate and SAC Member, Dr. Jill Keeffe, Professor at the Centre for Eye Research Australia and SightFirst Technical Advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Hoppe, OD, MPH, Founding Dean of the College of Optometry at Western University of Health Sciences and NEHEP Planning Committee Member and Neyal J. Ammary-Risch, MPH, CHES, Deputy Director of NEHEP. Also present were Ed McManus and Phoebe Sebring, consultants for the SFLRP effort, and Phillip Albano, Joshua Friedman, Karim Bengraine, Kristen Eckert and Gina Prendki of the LCIF Sight Programs Department. With this information, the SFLRP Working Group suggests the following conclusions and strategies for future SightFirst support of eye health education:

**Conclusions**

- Eye health education programs, like LEHP, remain a viable SightFirst activity for Lions from middle & high-income countries.

- Some eye health education activities may be an appropriate addition to SightFirst projects in low-income countries.

- No additional SightFirst resources need be invested in the U.S. LEHP materials.

**Strategies Moving Forward**

1. **National-level eye health education initiatives:** It is recommended that SightFirst continue to provide grants to Lions from middle & high-income countries that wish to establish national-level eye health education initiatives. As always, these projects should be implemented only where adequate eye care services exist. New programs should closely model existing Lions programs to avoid duplication of effort. LEHP Australia, in particular, models best practices in the areas of resource development, partnerships, personnel, training, special events, external funding and Lions involvement. Finally, an effort should be made by LCIF to review the process by which Lions apply for SightFirst funds for eye health education projects.

2. **Eye health education as part of SightFirst projects in low-income countries:** In an effort to support the development of comprehensive eye care systems, it is recommended
that SightFirst provide limited funds, as appropriate, for eye health education activities included as part of SightFirst projects in low-income countries. The materials developed for these activities might be modeled after existing Lions materials, but should include locally accurate and relevant messaging.

3. **Eye health education materials for U.S. Lions:** The materials developed by LCIF for the U.S. LEHP initiative should continue to be made available to U.S. clubs and districts as long as the current supply remains. When the supply is depleted, however, U.S. Lions should be encouraged to obtain and brand materials made available through NEHEP. This approach will not only provide cost savings to SightFirst, but it will make available to U.S. Lions, a wider range of the most current eye health education information.

**Next Steps**

Should the SAC approve the strategies outlined above, the SFLRP Working Group recommends the following next steps with regards to implementation:

- The Sight Programs Department will review and revise, if necessary, the process by which Lions from developed countries apply for SightFirst grants to support national-level eye health education projects.

- The Sight Programs Department will meet with NEHEP leaders to coordinate an easy and affordable process by which U.S. Lions can obtain and brand the many eye health education materials available through NEHEP.