The value of vision
Insight into why vision benefits are critical to your employees—and to your business
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The value of vision

The need for vision correction is so prevalent, it can actually be easy to overlook. In fact, nearly 183 million U.S. adults use some form of vision correction.

Meeting this growing need can actually drive better results for your business. But the value of vision goes way beyond eyewear—it helps employees live healthier lives and take better care of their families. Vision benefits encourage employees to schedule routine eye exams, which means your workforce can take charge of its eye health and its overall wellness. As with most medical conditions, vision issues become more severe and more costly the later they’re detected and treated.

A competitive vision benefit is also a valuable tool for employers to recruit and retain talent (while vision insurance is extremely popular among employees, only 35% of employers offer it).

There is a significant need for employers to offer flexible, comprehensive vision-care packages to their workforces. Vision loss may increase by as much as 135% over the next few decades. The demand is only growing, and the demand for choices is growing, too.

Here we show you why vision benefits are so important to employees and your business, and how many ways they can create value. You might be surprised by what you see.

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A growing need

The next time you’re in a meeting, look around the room. How many of your colleagues wear glasses or contacts?

The need for vision correction is so prevalent, it can actually be easy to overlook. In fact, nearly 183 million U.S. adults use some form of vision correction — that’s more than three-fourths of Americans aged 18 or older. Not only that, but of U.S. adults who don’t use vision correction, 21.3% — 12.8 million people — say they need vision help but haven’t done anything about it.

When you consider your workforce, it’s safe to assume the majority of employees are in need of vision correction, whether for themselves or for a family member. Factor in the effects of aging, exposure to damaging blue light and the exponential increase in screen usage (90% of Americans use digital devices for 2 or more hours each day), and vision care benefits will become only more important to your employees in years to come.

Vision benefits empower your employees not only to see better, but to live healthier lives and take better care of their families. In turn, your employees are more productive, making for a more satisfied and engaged staff that drives better results for your business.

50k people lose their sight each year, even though half of all cases of blindness can be prevented with proper care.

VISION NEEDS FOR ALL AGES

1.6 MILLION

Americans aged 50 years and older have age-related macular degeneration.

70% of Millennials report symptoms of digital eye strain.

Across all age groups, eye strain ranks as one of the most common symptoms associated with digital device use, 2nd only to neck and shoulder pain.

80%

Parents who express concern over the possible harm being done to their children’s eyes by digital devices.

5% of preschool-aged children have an eye problem that could result in permanent vision loss if left untreated.

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THE BROADER BENEFITS OF VISION CARE

Supporting overall health

Did you know eye exams are an accurate means of detecting high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes? Vision care can help people live longer, healthier lives.

The eyes provide doctors with a unique window into the human body: a clear view of blood vessels, arteries and a cranial nerve that give physicians a better picture of overall health. Earlier diagnosis of health problems, of course, enables patients to seek treatment sooner and improves the likelihood of a successful outcome. For example, Prevent Blindness America reports that diabetes affects more than 23 million Americans and is the leading cause of blindness in adults ages 20–74. And the American Optometric Association has found that 12,000–24,000 people lose their vision every year because of diabetes complications that often could have been prevented through early detection and timely treatment.

To bring those numbers closer to home, think of it this way: 1 of every 12 Americans has diabetes, which means your workforce is likely to include dozens of employees at increased risk of vision-related complications such as glaucoma, cataracts and blindness. 2.7 million U.S. adults over 40 have glaucoma, which affects the optic nerve and is a leading cause of blindness. It’s estimated that 2 million more Americans suffer from glaucoma but have not been diagnosed.

Vision insurance encourages employees to schedule routine eye exams, which means your workforce can take charge of its eye health and its overall wellness. Diagnosed conditions can be treated more quickly—and more cost-effectively—leading to a healthier team with potentially lower healthcare expenses. According to the Vision Council, employers can gain $7 for every $1 invested in vision coverage.13

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THE EMPLOYER’S ROLE

Taking the lead

While the Affordable Care Act is putting pressure on employers from a healthcare perspective, ancillary benefits such as vision and dental coverage provide a welcome respite.

The Segal Group 2015 Health Plan Cost Trend Survey indicated that vision and dental benefits were not experiencing the high level of inflation associated with medical-care costs. That simplified the decision for employers to offer those benefits to employees, who clearly appreciate them. A MetLife benefits trend study found that 71% of employees indicated an interest in vision care, making it the most popular voluntary benefit among workers. And a 2014 Society for Human Resource Management study showed that, in 2013, 83% of employees who were offered vision coverage elected to enroll, up from 78% in 2012.

Stand-alone vision benefits do not count toward an employee’s medical-care deductible, which means employees begin seeing the benefit with their very first purchase. That’s good news for vision consumers and their employers, because almost a quarter of employees say they take periodic breaks to rest their tired, strained eyes. Not surprisingly, that has a negative impact on workplace productivity.

Somewhere there’s a disconnect between what employees want and need and what employers perceive to be important. That means you have an opportunity: offering a vision benefit positions your company as a forward-thinking, employee-centered organization that cares about its team and goes the extra mile for its people.

Only 35% of employers offer vision insurance, though more than half provide dental coverage.

Only 50% of the 61 million American adults at high risk of vision loss have gone to an eye doctor in the past year.

WHAT CONSUMERS WANT

Providing more choices

It’s easy to see why and how much consumers value vision care. Access to that care can be a valuable recruiting tool.

Think back to that meeting room we mentioned earlier, and do a quick head count of your colleagues who wear prescription eyeglasses or contact lenses, as well as those who use reading glasses periodically. Each one of those coworkers of yours is a vision-care consumer, which means each one has a stake in what your company does or doesn’t offer in the way of benefits. Anecdotally, you probably can imagine the impact of your coverage package on your workforce.

Choice is a huge factor at play in this day of healthcare consumerism. As the costs of medical care have risen, employees have become more savvy about scrutinizing what they’re paying for and why. They’re growing accustomed to the ability to compare health plans and shop for better options, and the same is true for vision and dental coverage. Employees who enroll expect to have ready access to a variety of products, providers and services, and they’re willing to pay for higher quality. For example, Aon found that when it offered a 3-tier plan on its private exchange, 52% of enrollees chose the highest tier, the Gold plan. The Silver plan was selected by 31%, and the Bronze plan was chosen by just 17%.

Your employees want what they want when they want it—and vision care is no exception. That makes a competitive vision benefit a valuable tool for employers to recruit and retain talent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VISION IN DEMAND</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nearly 50 million Americans own multiple pairs of prescription glasses²⁰</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consumers who view vision benefits as important or very important²¹</td>
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<tr>
<td>80% of employees used their vision benefits for a comprehensive eye exam in 2013, up from 60% in 2012²²</td>
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<tr>
<td>28 million Americans wear non-prescription reading glasses²⁰</td>
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<tr>
<td>90% of employees say vision benefits will increase in importance as they get older, and they’re looking for coverage that includes high-tech options²⁰</td>
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<td>Employees who rank as “important” the ability to have a choice of levels in vision coverage²³</td>
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Seeing the demand for vision

A future of flying cars, robot housekeepers and jetpacks may await. But as exciting as that sounds, there are also some very serious projections to consider.

According to Prevent Blindness America, by 2050, vision loss will increase by 135%, to more than 10 million people. Cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and advanced age-related macular degeneration are forecast to grow by 77% to affect almost 70 million adults. This widespread increase in vision issues also means an increase in total real costs, by 157% from $145 billion in 2014 to $373 billion in 2050. There’s already a marked surge in the use of vision correction. From 2013–14, there was a net increase of more than 1 million vision-correction patients, particularly among women and Baby Boomers.

These numbers underscore the need for employers to offer flexible, comprehensive vision-care packages to their workforces. The demand is only growing. And the fact is that when employees benefit, so do employers. Think for a moment about the converse of that statement: when employees suffer, so do employers. Almost 80% of employees say they deal with a visual disturbance that bothers their eyes every day at work. In fact, 53% of employees report taking at least 1 break per day to rest their eyes. Almost a third of workers take 3 or more breaks, and 13% report needing more than 5 breaks in a workday. What does all that mean? If an employee takes even a 1-minute eye-rest break twice a day, it can add up to a full day of lost time over the course of a year.

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The rising costs of vision loss

As with most medical conditions, vision issues become more severe and more costly the later they’re detected and treated.

In 2013, eye disorders and vision loss were among the most expensive health concerns in the U.S., at $139 billion.

Aside from direct healthcare costs, vision problems racked up $72.2 billion in expenses such as lost productivity and long-term care.

It costs $6,680 per person per year to pay for the treatment of blindness and low vision.

Lost productivity carries a price tag of a staggering $48 billion.27

When you value their vision

Providing vision care for employees shouldn’t be thought of as an expense but as an investment in the wellness, happiness and productivity of your workforce.

Comprehensive eye exams can uncover not only vision issues but serious health problems as well, making it possible for employees to seek treatment sooner. Early detection increases the likelihood of good outcomes and can decrease the overall cost of care. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, right? Then a cent spent on prevention can be worth untold dollars of treatment later.

The rise in the need for vision care, and in employees’ appreciation of the benefit, presents an opportunity for your company to distinguish itself from other employers in a competitive recruiting landscape to attract and retain top talent. Millennials, in particular, expect to have more choices, and they’ve been found to value benefits at least as much as salary.²⁸

As employees’ needs and expectations change, your company’s benefits offerings should evolve, too. When you’re ready to take the next step, look for a benefits provider that drives innovation and challenges the status quo to give members more of what they want: a diverse network, plans that redefine expectations and benefits that are simple to understand and use.

You see the value in your employees. Now, show them you see the value in caring for their vision.

We look forward to helping you and your employees see life to the fullest.

To get started, visit starthere.eyemed.com or contact your EyeMed sales rep.

²⁸ Capstrat/FGI research, 2011.