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VisionSpring's screening methodology is adopted by the World Health Organization to increase global access to reading glasses

- Lack of access to affordable eyeglasses inhibits educational and life outcomes for nearly a billion people globally, and diagnosing poor vision is a major challenge in low-income countries.
- Most of the people in need of eyeglasses could see clearly with just a simple pair of reading glasses.
- By endorsing the training of health workers and nurses to identify blurry near vision and dispense reading glasses, the WHO's new training program is helping solve this billion-person issue.

January 5, 2023, New York - VisionSpring's screening methodology has been adopted by the World Health Organisation's new open-access [Training in Assistive Products \(TAP\)](#). TAP equips primary healthcare providers, such as nurses and community health workers, with the skills they need to identify blurry near vision (presbyopia), dispense reading glasses, and refer for other eye conditions. WHO's dissemination of this de-medicalized approach to basic eye care represents a major step forward in addressing the global problem of uncorrected blurry vision which affects 1 billion people.

Of the 1 billion people who do not have the glasses they need to see clearly; the majority just need a simple pair of reading glasses. To help solve this problem, VisionSpring pioneered an approach to deploy the simplest, cheapest technology (reading glasses), using community health workers in countries with few eye doctors.

Since 2006, its Reading Glasses for Improved Livelihoods (RGIL) program has corrected the vision of 2 million people. RGIL's success drove and informed TAP's Vision Assistive Products module, along with contributions from other NGOs who have replicated the approach.

Dr. Jordan Kassalow, the founder of VisionSpring and co-founder of EYElliance, served as lead technical advisor for vision on the TAP committee and co-authored the reading glasses module.

Dr. Kassalow explained, "Back in 2006, the idea that age-related blurry vision could be treated outside of the doctor's office by community health workers was controversial. People feared that trusting anyone but accredited medical professionals to perform a basic vision screening would be dangerous.

“Therefore, it is significant that the World Health Organization has created a program adopting our once radical methodology to allow community workers to screen poor vision – it highlights how the status quo is changing.

“It doesn’t get more mainstream than earning the imprimatur of WHO and it turns a small initiative with success in certain markets to a globally accepted methodology that has huge scope to scale.”

The TAP training will help governments, health providers and other development organizations integrate basic vision care into their primary care services and accelerate the uptake of reading glasses.

Reading glasses are a powerful tool for social and economic development. They have been shown to improve income earning, productivity, reduce depression and anxiety, and increase participation in community and family life.

However, in many low- and middle-income countries, reading glasses are only available through hospitals, vision centers and optical shops. Whereas in high-income countries, they are readily available as a consumer good in book shops, pharmacies, and even grocery stores.

De-medicalizing access to reading glasses with the help of TAP will make it easy and convenient for millions of people to have their sight checked by health workers and nurses and gain the immediate benefit of vision correction.

WHO created Training in Assistive Products as an open-source online learning platform to improve access to assistive technologies, that include reading glasses in addition to walking aids, emergency wheelchairs, and more.

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About VisionSpring

Founded in 2001, VisionSpring is the social enterprise accelerating the use of eyeglasses in emerging and frontier markets. Our mission is to increase lifelong earning, learning, safety, and well-being through eyeglasses for people vulnerable to poverty. We believe in the wonder of clear vision for everyone and envision a world in which all who need glasses will have them to see well and do well by 2050. As of 2021, VisionSpring corrected the vision of 8.7 million people living on less than \$4 per-day, unlocking \$1.8 billion in income earning potential. VisionSpring has been recognized for its innovative work, receiving the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship; social entrepreneur fellowships from Draper Richards Kaplan, the Aspen Institute, and the Schwab Foundation; and honors from World Bank, Duke University, Fast Company, and Tribeca Film Festival, among others.

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