



Vision Loss

**Everything You Wanted To
Know But Were
Afraid To Ask!**

People with vision loss can continue to lead productive, dignified and fulfilling lives.

We can help.

What will I learn from this booklet?

This booklet is for people with vision loss and their caregivers. It answers many common questions and suggests ways people with poor eyesight can continue to lead safe, independent and fulfilling lives.

My eye doctor says I have “low vision”. What does it mean?

Low vision means that you have a vision problem that cannot be corrected with typical eyeglasses, surgery or medication. It is different than the normal vision problems that occur with age, such as trouble reading, needing more light to see, and problems with glare (although they can be worse with low vision). You will often see the terms “low vision”, “vision loss” and “vision impairment” used interchangeably.

I've been diagnosed with an eye disease. Can you tell me what it means?

The four most common eye conditions are:

- **Cataracts** make the eye's lens cloudy. This condition can usually be treated by surgery.
- **Glaucoma** can cause increased pressure in the eye and affect the optic nerve. It is usually treated with daily eye drops.
- **Macular Degeneration** affects the macula, which is in the center of the retina and provides sharp straight-ahead vision. Ask your eye doctor if any available treatments are right for you.
- **Diabetic Retinopathy** causes damage to the retina as a result of diabetes. It is sometimes treated with a laser. Control of diabetes is very important.

Be sure to follow any treatments and take any medications prescribed by your eye doctor.

The Human Eye

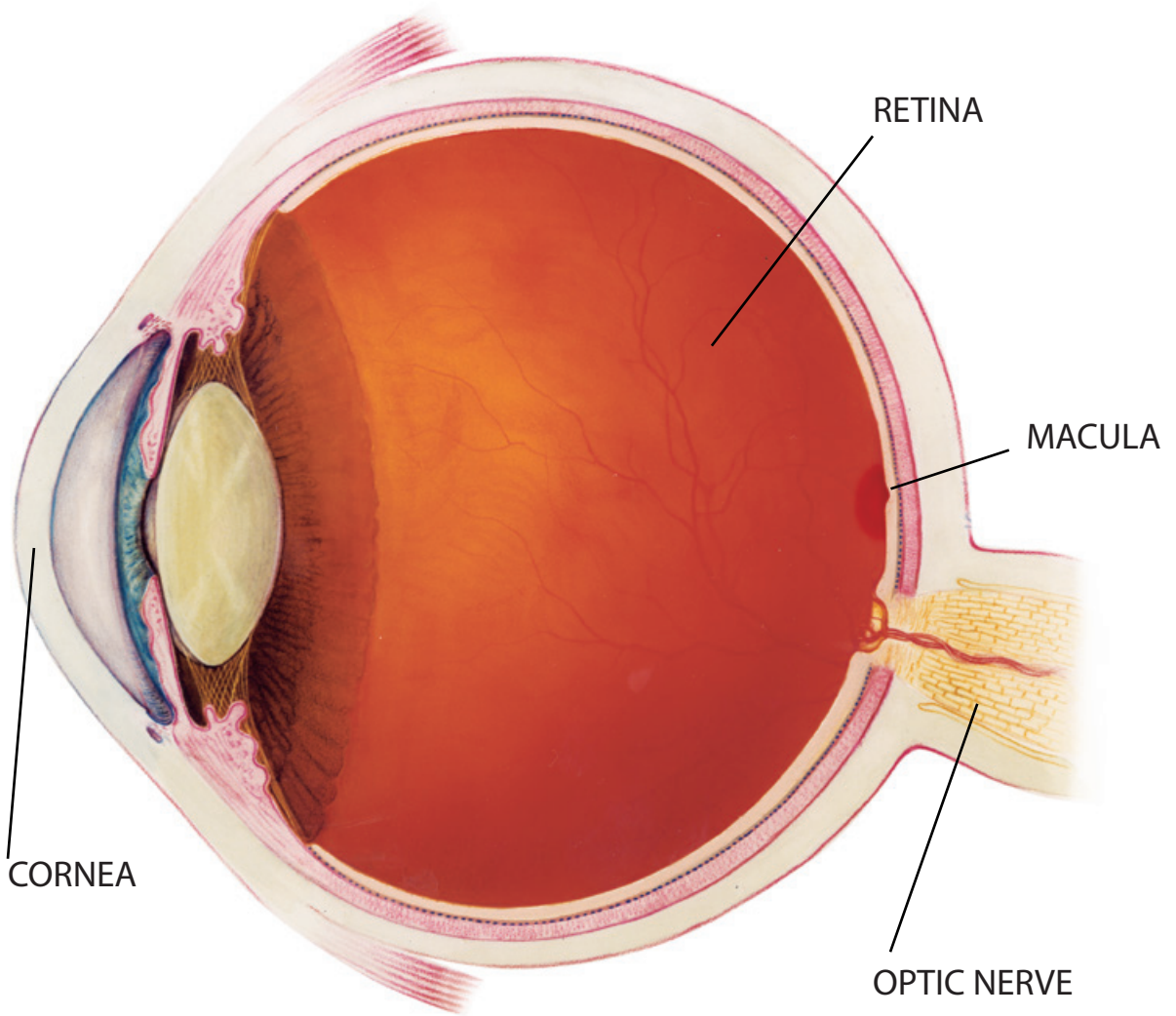


Image courtesy of the National Eye Institute, National Institutes of Health

How will eye disease affect my vision?

Common vision problems and the eye diseases they are usually caused by are:

- **Blurry vision** (cataracts)
- **Center, or straight-ahead vision loss** (macular degeneration)
- **Peripheral** (all-around the sides) **vision loss** (glaucoma)
- **Combination vision loss** (diabetic retinopathy)
- **Glare and contrast problems** (can occur with many eye diseases)

Vision loss from eye disease is unique to each person, but most people do not lose their vision completely.



BLURRY VISION
(CATARACT)



CENTER VISION LOSS
(MACULAR DEGENERATION)



SIDE VISION LOSS
(GLAUCOMA)



COMBINATION LOSS
(DIABETIC RETINOPATHY)



GLARE PROBLEM



CONTRAST PROBLEM

Are there other things that can affect my vision?

Other conditions that can sometimes cause vision loss are:

- **Head trauma**, from accidents (especially concussions) or strokes
- **Medical conditions**, such as diabetes or multiple sclerosis
- **Medications**, for example steroids

These conditions can cause any of the vision problems discussed (blurry vision, center vision loss, side vision loss, combination vision loss, and problems with glare and contrast).

The vision changes can be permanent or temporary. For example, vision loss from medication will usually get better after the medication has been stopped. Always discuss any vision changes with your doctor.



LEFT SIDE VISION LOSS



RIGHT LOWER QUADRANT VISION LOSS

Head trauma usually causes loss of vision to either side, or to a specific area of vision, as shown. It can also result in other vision problems.

How do I know if I have a vision problem?

There are signs that you may have a vision problem that is not due to normal changes in vision that occur with age. Ask yourself if you have trouble even with your best eyeglasses on:

- Seeing, even with eyeglasses on
- Doing close-up tasks like reading, writing, or dialing a phone
- Seeing objects across a room, like the TV
- Recognizing faces
- Writing clearly or on a straight line
- Walking without bumping into, or tripping over things
- Eating without knocking items over

If you answer yes to any of these questions, or are having problems you think might be due to your vision, you should have an eye exam.



Needing to hold reading material very close or very far away, or squinting can be signs of a vision problem.

How can I get help?

Specialized low vision services are available.
These include:

- **A low vision examination**
- **Provision of low vision devices**
- **Low vision rehabilitation training**
- **Home environment modifications**
- **Travel training**
- **Support groups and counseling**

Ask about where to find low vision services in your community, or have a family member go online to see what is available!



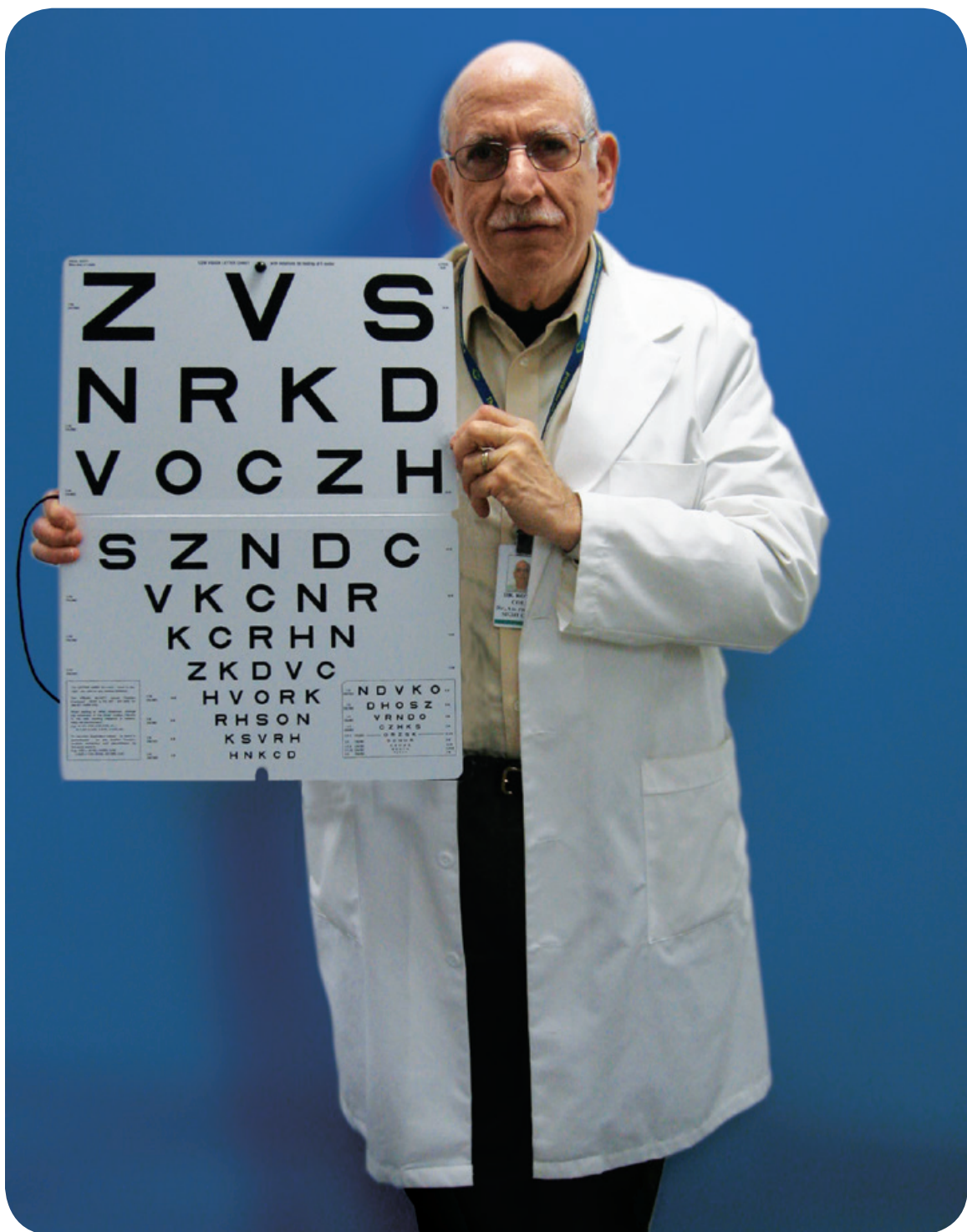
Low vision services help you find ways to make the best use of the vision you do have.

What happens in a low vision examination?

A low vision exam is different from a routine eye exam. The low vision doctor (an optometrist or ophthalmologist) will:

- **Talk** to you about activities you want or need to do every day
- **Check** how well you can see, and if you need new eyeglasses
- **Evaluate** you for devices to help you perform daily tasks (cook, read, see television, etc.)
- **Help** you develop other solutions that allow you to continue those activities despite some (or even total) loss of vision

Sometimes the solution is as simple as having the correct magnifier prescribed by your low vision doctor!



The low vision doctor may use special charts with large numbers or letters to tell how well you can see.

What devices can help me read?

Low vision devices are used to magnify print, and they should be prescribed by a low vision doctor. They include:

- **Special high-powered glasses** (with extra magnification built in)
- **Magnifiers** (hand-held or on a stand - some even have a built-in light)
- **Telescopes** (hand-held or in eyeglasses)
- **Special televisions (CCTVs)** (allow magnification and contrast control)

Can't you just make my glasses stronger?

Vision problems caused by eye disease are NOT problems with focusing. Regular eyeglasses usually can only correct focusing.



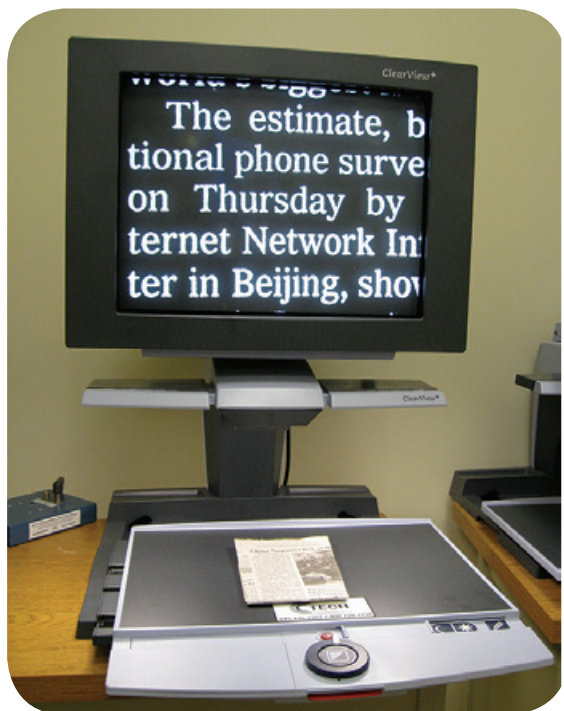
SPECIAL READING GLASSES



MAGNIFIERS



TELESCOPES



CCTV

What is low vision rehabilitation training?

Your low vision doctor may refer you to other professionals on the low vision team. Common reasons are for training to use low vision devices in daily activities, or for instruction in techniques and other special devices that help you remain independent in everyday life. This is usually provided by an occupational therapist or vision rehabilitation teacher, and may include activities such as:

- **Training in using a magnifier to read medication bottles or food labels**
- **Techniques for organizing and labeling food items, or clothing for easy identification**
- **Instruction in safe food preparation such as chopping or cutting, cooking on a stove, or pouring hot liquids**
- **Assistive devices and tips for signing your name, writing lists, or keeping other records**
- **And much more!**



An occupational therapist can teach new techniques for food preparation.

Will I be able to cook, bathe and take care of myself?

Yes! Vision loss can make activities of daily living more difficult. This can be frustrating and you may feel embarrassed.

Don't give up! Most people can learn new ways to complete everyday activities by using new techniques and special devices for:

- **Cooking and eating**
- **Organizing clothing**
- **Personal care**
- **Reading, writing, and managing time**
- **Leisure activities**
- **Organizing and taking medications**
- **And more!**



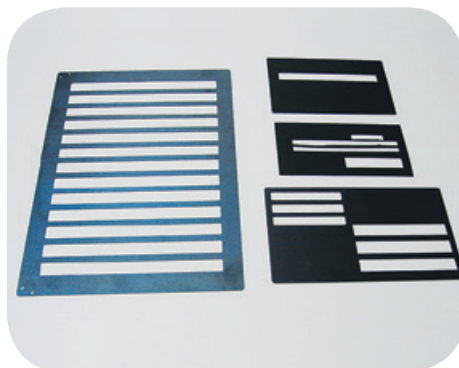
CREATE CONTRAST



SAY WHEN



LARGE TIMERS



WRITING GUIDES



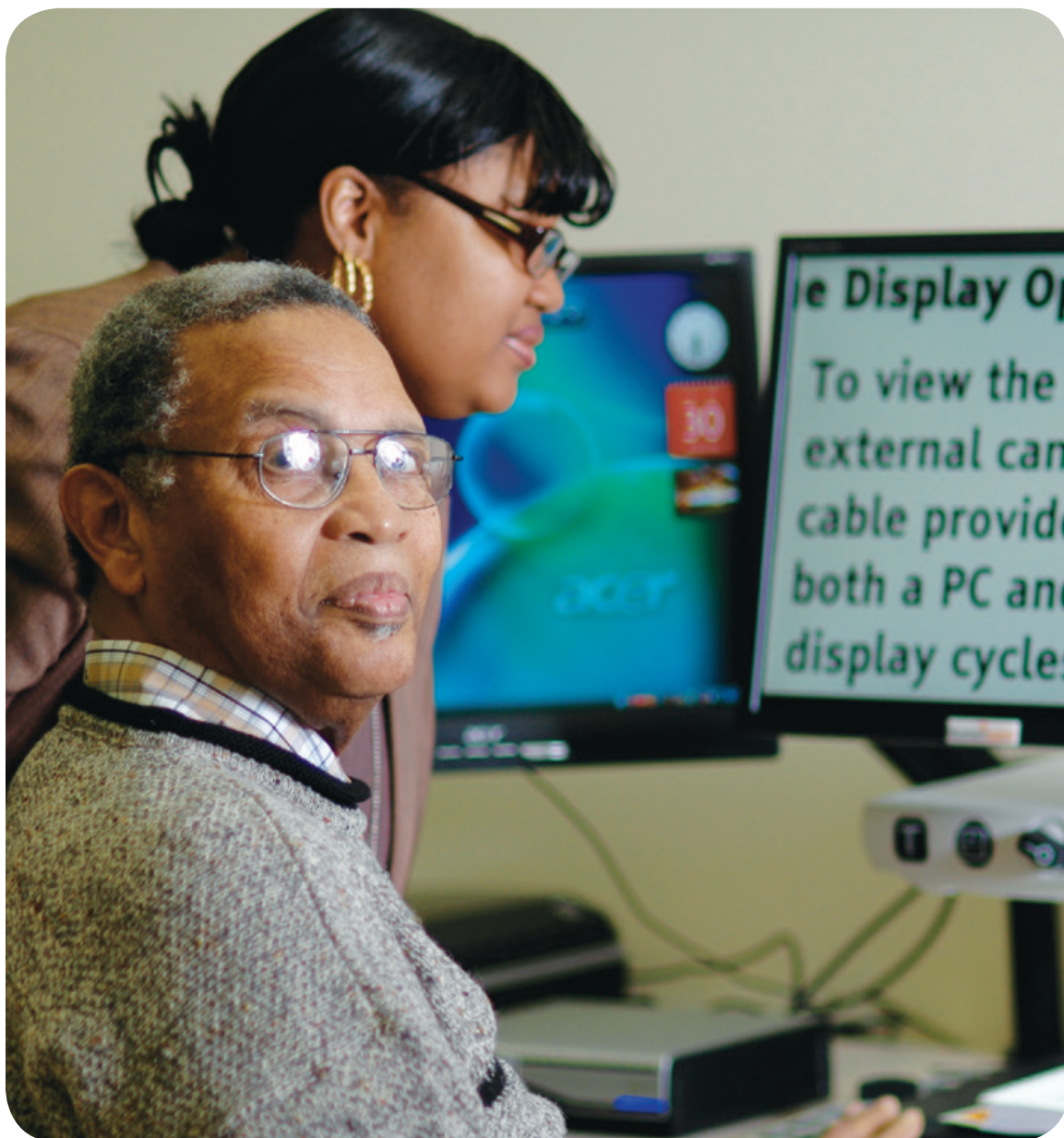
HIGH CONTRAST AND TALKING WATCHES



What's available to help me use my computer and cellphone?

For many of us, computers are an important resource for information, recreation and communication. The good news is that technology to help people with vision loss use computers more easily is available and developing rapidly! For example:

- **Oversized screen monitors**
- **Adjustable monitor arms to bring the screen closer to your face**
- **Software that magnifies the text on the screen**
- **Software that reverses the screen contrast for white letters on black background**
- **Big-button keyboards, and large print overlays for existing keyboards**
- **Audio software that can read text out loud**
- **Special enhancements or voice output for cellphones**



Ask your low vision doctor or rehabilitation therapist for adaptive computer and cellphone resources, or search online for information on accessible computers.

What changes are needed in my home?

- **Check lighting:** make sure you have enough light, and a variety of lighting
- **Create contrast:** the more the better, in all areas of the environment (for example, switchplates that contrast to the wall color)
- **Remove glare:** whether from an inside or outside source (for example, sunlight bouncing off a mirror)
- **Be safe:** eliminate hazards, and add safety items (for example, grab bars and non-skid mats in all bathrooms)
- **Be consistent:** return items to the same place every time they are used, and remind others to do the same



MARK DIALS



DIRECT LIGHTING



CREATE CONTRAST



CONTROL GLARE



AVOID HAZARDS

How will I be able to get around?

A mobility instructor can teach you ways to travel safely within your home, as well as outside in public areas. These include:

- **Trailing:** you find your way by sliding the edge of your hand along a wall or railing to locate doorways and other destinations
- **Special canes:** usually white and red, these canes can be used to avoid hazards while walking, or to identify you to others as visually impaired
- **The guide technique:** a way for a person with vision loss to travel safely with another person



TRAILING WHILE HOLDING
A LONG CANE



BODY POSITION FOR
GUIDE TECHNIQUE



TRADITIONAL ARM GRIP



HOOK METHOD GRIP

I'm having trouble coping with my vision loss. Who can help me?

Losing vision can cause depression and other emotions, such as anger or frustration. These feelings are natural. There are ways to deal with them and people that can help, for example:

- **Support groups:** where you can talk about your problems with others going through the same experiences
- **Counseling:** in one-on-one or group meetings with a professional counselor. This is perhaps most important if you are feeling depressed
- **Family members:** can be your main support. They can help you cope, while encouraging you to stay active

You can also find a lot of resources and help online.



GROUP SUPPORT



COUNSELING



FAMILY SUPPORT

THANK YOU!

We're here to help you.

We hope you have a better understanding of the changes that may occur with vision loss.

If you have vision loss that is interfering with your daily activities and quality of life, Lighthouse Guild low vision services and vision rehabilitation training can help. Low vision services and vision rehabilitation training can provide you with the skills and confidence you need to overcome the challenges of vision loss.

Lighthouse Guild is the leading not-for-profit vision + healthcare organization with a longstanding heritage of addressing the needs of people who are blind or visually impaired, including those with multiple disabilities or chronic medical conditions.

By integrating vision + healthcare services and expanding access through education and awareness, we help people lead productive, dignified and fulfilling lives.

For more information

800-539-4845

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lighthouseguild.org

