

NAEVR Meets with the Surgeon General to Advance Vision and Eye Health



From left: United States Surgeon General Jerome Adams, MD, MPH and Deputy Surgeon General Erica Schwartz, MD, JD

On June 13, vision community organization and federal agency representatives (see box left), including NAEVR's James Jorkasky, met under the auspices of VISION 2020 USA with Surgeon General Jerome Adams, MD, MPH and Deputy Surgeon General Erica Schwartz, MD, JD, to discuss a Call to Action for vision and eye health in the United States, per recommendations that resulted from the September 2016 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report entitled *Making Eye Health a Population Health Imperative: Vision for Tomorrow*. NAEVR served as a NASEM report sponsor.

The meeting was held in response to a January 14, 2019, letter sent by VISION 2020 USA on behalf of 26 signatory organizations requesting that the Surgeon General initiate a national Call to Action for vision and eye health to mark the year 2020. The NASEM report was developed over two years and authored by a 15-member expert panel. It provides a detailed assessment of the importance of vision and the need to evaluate, monitor, and protect eye health to reduce vision impairment and achieve better health quality of life and equity for all Americans. It made nine specific recommendations for a national strategy to eliminate correctable and avoidable vision impairments in the U.S. by the year 2030, including four of which are federally related (see box below).

Highlights of the conversation included:

- Dr. Adams encouraged the vision community to ensure that vision was not “siloe”—that it should integrate within other HHS programs and its relationship to major chronic disease, such as cardiovascular disease and Alzheimer's.
- Options for Surgeon General action include a Call to Action, a Surgeon General's Report, or an Advisory, none of which are mutually exclusive. In offering advice on these routes, he cautioned that each should convey tangible activities and not just be commemorative gestures.

At the end of the meeting, the vision community organization representatives discussed potential next steps and timing.



Representatives at the SG meeting included:

Federal Agency:

Kristina Beaugh, MPH NEI
Maria Zacharias NEI
Jinan B. Saaddine, MD, MPH CDC

Vision Community Organization:

David Glasser, MD
American Academy of Ophthalmology

Lori Grover, OD, PhD
American Optometric Association

Alan R. Morse, PhD, JD
Lighthouse Guild

James Jorkasky, MBA
National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research

Jeff Todd, JD
Prevent Blindness

Sandra S. Block, OD, MPH
Illinois College of Optometry

Mitchell Brinks, MD, MPH
VISION 2020 USA

Federal Government-related NASEM Report recommendations:

- The Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) should issue a **Call to Action** to motivate nationwide action toward achieving a reduction in the burden of vision impairment across the lifespan of people in the United States.
- The DHHS Secretary should launch a coordinated **Public Awareness Campaign** in collaboration with other federal agencies and departments, nonprofit and for-profit organizations, professional organizations, employers, state and local health agencies, and the media.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) should develop a **Coordinated Surveillance System for Eye and Vision Health** in the U.S.
- The DHHS Secretary should create an **Interagency Workgroup**, including a wide range of public, private, and community stakeholders, to develop a common research agenda and coordinated eye and vision health research and demonstration grant programs that target the leading causes, consequences, and unmet need of vision impairment.

NAEVR Commends Dr. Sieving's Service to All Americans



Paul Sieving, MD, PhD

On June 27, James Jorkasky issued the following statement after NIH Director Francis Collins, MD, PhD announced that NEI Director Paul Sieving, MD, PhD was leaving to create a new Center for Ocular Regenerative Therapy at the University of California at Davis:

“Since the NAEVR and AEVR Alliances serve as the privately funded “Friends of the NEI,” on behalf of the Boards I commend Paul Sieving, MD, PhD for his 18 years of service as NEI's Director. Leading our nation's primary Institute for research to prevent blindness and restore vision, he managed the NEI during a period of unprecedented opportunity and advancement in both vision research breakthroughs and in commercialized treatments and therapies for blinding eye diseases. As an exemplary scientist and visionary, he initiated key programs aimed at restoring vision, including the Audacious Goals Initiative in Regenerative Medicine. NAEVR wishes Dr. Sieving much continued success in his new initiative in the private sector—which will undoubtedly lead to advancements that will ultimately benefit all Americans.”

The Alliances will present a plaque to Dr. Sieving at a September 5 ceremony on the NIH campus.

On July 11, Mr. Jorkasky joined with ARVO Executive Director Iris Rush in meeting with then-NEI Deputy Director Santa Tumminia, PhD, who is now serving as Acting NEI Director.