

When Patients Can't Pay for Eye Exams/Glasses/Medication 21 Sources That Can Help

EXAMS

EyeCare America celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. It offers its services through 7,000 volunteer Eye M.D.s. Seniors who have not had an eye exam for three years may be eligible for eye exams and up to one year of care at no out-of-pocket cost. Uninsured patients at increased risk for glaucoma who have not had an eye exam for 12 months may be eligible for a free glaucoma eye exam. Patients must be U.S. citizens or legal residents and cannot belong to an HMO or have eye care coverage through the VA. Medications, eyeglasses and surgery aren't covered, but ECA's website lists an A to Z of prescription assistance programs. ECA is an Academy Foundation program. (www.eyecareamerica.org)

EYEGASSES/EXAMS

Lions Clubs may pay for eye exams and eyeglasses. Go online and use "Find a Club" to contact your local club. (630-571-5466; www.lionsclubs.org)

Low-cost eyeglasses online. Patients can obtain single-vision prescription eyeglasses for as little as \$8 (plus shipping) from online optical dispensaries. Higher levels of refractive error may cost more. Patients will need to understand how frames are sized, pupil-to-pupil distances, etc. Websites include www.zennioptical.com, www.selectspecks.com and www.39dollarglasses.com.

New Eyes for the Needy provides vouchers for eyeglasses for adults and children but recently has had funding problems. Requests must come from a social worker, agency or school nurse working with patients. (973-376-4903; www.neweyesfortheneedy.org)

OneSight provides free in-store exams and eyewear at Luxottica and LensCrafters retail stores, and mobile clinics. Recipients are preselected by local charities. See website for calendar of upcoming clinics. (www.onesight.org/na/)

Prevent Blindness America partners with providers of eye care and optical services providers to refer patients for free eye exams and eyeglasses. (800-331-2020; www.preventblindness.org)

SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program) provides children from low-income families with medical exams, eyeglasses, medications and other services at little or no cost. Access is through state Medicaid offices. (877-543-7669)

Sight for Students operates nationally through community partners, providing free eye exams and eyeglasses to children (up to age 18) if family income is less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. (800-290-4964; www.sightforstudents.org)

Vision USA provides free exams and, in some cases, free or low-cost eyeglasses to low-income adults and children who lack vision coverage (public or private) and who have not had an eye exam within two years. (800-766-4466; www.aoa.org/visionusa.xml)

MEDICATIONS

Drug discount cards require careful scrutiny, especially those programs that charge a membership fee, according to consumer advocates. Savings can be as low as 10 percent and as high as 70 percent. Patients should verify discounts; assure that the medications they need are included; and watch out for hidden costs, such as shipping. One discount card worth noting is Together RxAccess (800-444-4106; www.togetherrxaccess.com), which is jointly offered by 10 pharmaceutical companies.

Genentech Access Solutions helps the uninsured find public coverage for Lucentis and other drugs, and helps the insured with obtaining approval for treatment. If coverage is denied, patients can apply for assistance from the Genentech Access to Care Foundation. (800-724-9394; www.genentechaccesssolutions.com)

HealthWell Foundation provides financial assistance to pay the high copayments required for treating life-threatening or chronic diseases (including AMD) with expensive new medications such as Lucentis. The program also helps in some cases with health insurance premiums. (800-675-8416; www.healthwellfoundation.org)

Macugen Access Program helps patients with wet AMD determine whether insurance will cover therapy with Macugen. If no other funding source can be found, patients who meet income criteria can receive up to one year of medication free. (866-272-8838; www.macugen.com/map.asp)

NeedyMeds offers a database of medications that can be obtained free or at low cost by uninsured, low-income patients, usually through manufacturer programs. Also provides Web-based software, PAPRx, that helps you create and track the forms that pharmaceutical companies require for indigent patients. (www.needymeds.org)

Partnership for Prescription Assistance provides information about 475 public and private prescription assistance programs. Includes lists of free clinics and a database searchable by geographic area. It is funded by drug manufacturers. (888-477-2669; www.pppparx.com)

Patient Access Network Foundation provides up to \$4,000 in copay assistance to patients undergoing pharmaceutical treatment for AMD and who have incomes less than 400 percent of the federal poverty level for their household size (for two people, this would be \$58,280). (866-316-7263; www.panfoundation.org)

RxAssist provides consumer information, news and a directory of patient assistance programs that offer affordable or free medications. It lists sources—such as RxOutreach (www.rxoutreach.org)—that can reduce patient costs for generic medicines. (401-729-3284; www.rxassist.org)

RxHope.com provides a centralized system for a physician's staff member to access drug-company programs that can provide free or low-cost medicines. The secure, online system allows the user to fill out all forms, track the status of requests and order refills. The service is free to doctors and patients. (877-267-0517; www.RxHope.com)

Xubex Pharmaceutical Services offers low-cost generic drugs to patients who meet income guidelines. (866-699-8239; www.xubex.com)

SURGERY

Knights Templar Eye Foundation is a national program to pay ophthalmic surgical costs for low-income U.S. citizens who are uninsured. A letter of denial from a social or government agency is necessary for assistance. The program can pay for eyeglasses if associated with the surgery, but does not pay for follow-up care or medications. (847-490-3838; www.knightstemplar.org)

Mission Cataract USA lists practices that, on one day a year, offer free cataract surgery to people who lack the means to pay. (800-343- 7265; www.missioncataractusa.org)