

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Final Recommendation Statement on Screening for Impaired Visual Acuity in Older Adults

Task Force concludes evidence on primary care screening is insufficient

WASHINGTON, D.C. – March 1, 2016 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a final recommendation on screening for impaired visual acuity, or vision impairment, in adults 65 and older. The Task Force has concluded that for older adults who have not reported any vision problems, the current evidence is insufficient to assess the balance of benefits and harms of screening for vision impairment in primary care setting. This is an I statement and is not a recommendation for or against screening.

Vision impairments are a serious problem for older adults that can affect their independence and quality of life. Common causes of vision impairment are refractive errors (the reason most people wear glasses or contacts); cataracts, or the clouding of the eye's lens; and age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which distorts vision in the center of the eye.

In a primary care setting, clinicians typically check for eye conditions with an eye chart test. The Task Force found that while vision screening with an eye chart can identify people who have refractive errors, it does not accurately identify early-stage AMD or cataracts in people without symptoms of vision problems.

“We need more evidence on accurate ways to screen for eye conditions in older adults in a primary care setting,” says Task Force chair Al Siu, M.D., M.S.P.H.

“Older adults who are having vision problems should talk to their primary care doctor or eye specialist. In the absence of clear evidence, primary care doctors should use their clinical judgement when deciding whether to screen for vision problems in patients without vision symptoms,” adds Task Force member Michael Pignone, M.D., M.P.H.

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

Dr. Siu is the Ellen and Howard C. Katz Mount Sinai Health System chair and professor of the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. He is also director of the Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center at the James J. Peters Veterans Affairs Medical Center, and has served as deputy commissioner of the New York State Department of Health.

Grade in this recommendation:

I: The balance of benefits and harms cannot be determined.

[Learn more here](#)

Dr. Pignone is a professor of medicine at the University of North Carolina Department of Medicine and chief of the Division of General Internal Medicine. He also serves as director of the university's Institute for Healthcare Quality Improvement.

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