Healthy Eyes Healthy People®
grant application deadline March 2

The application deadline for 2009 AOA Healthy Eyes Healthy People® (HEHP) State Association Grants is now just days away, according to the AOA Clinical Care Group.

Application forms must be postmarked or faxed by March 2, 2009, according to Elton H. Brown, III, O.D., chair of the AOA Healthy Eyes Healthy People® Committee.

Initiated in 2004, the AOA HEHP grant program provides awards of up to $5,000 for innovative community outreach projects addressing the 10 targeted vision objectives established under the U.S. Department of Health & Human Service’s Healthy People 2010 public health agenda (see box).

Funded by Luxottica and VSP, the AOA HEHP grant program will make a total of $185,000 available to community eye and vision care efforts in 2009.

With this year’s anticipated grants, the program will have provided nearly $1 million in funding for vision outreach projects, Dr. Brown noted.

“At a time when an economic downturn is prompting concerns that some patients may put off necessary care, innovative community eye and vision care outreach programs may be more valuable – and more appreciated – than ever before,” said Elton H. Brown, III, O.D., chair of the AOA Healthy Eyes Healthy People® Committee.

Over the past five years HEHP projects have included a joint effort by an optometric practice and an Illinois county health department to provide eye examinations and education for patients with diabetes – which was adapted to place emphasis on unemployed workers and their families after a rash of plant closings and layoffs.

Others projects have include a community health center-based program in Massachusetts to provide care for people of Vietnamese, African-American, Caribbean black, and Latino heritage; a program in Puerto Rico that has trained teachers, school nurses and parents on the identification and prevention of vision problems; and a Louisiana program that has provided church-based vision screenings.

In many cases, projects are developed through partnership state agencies or local community groups.

Healthy People 2010 vision objectives can be best addressed by partnering with key stakeholders to develop collaborative health promotion and disease prevention projects at the state and local community level, Dr. Brown noted.

Under the federal Healthy People program, emphasis is placed on eliminating disparities which are impact care for disadvantaged populations, he added.

Grant applications must be officially submitted by an AOA-affiliated state optometric association.

However, all AOA members optometrists may apply for the grants through their state optometric association.

A state optometric association can submit more than one application.

HEHP State Association Application forms and instructions can be found on the AOA’s HEHP page (www.aoa.org/healthyp/ml).

In addition to the complete application form, letters of commitment, timeline, and budget are required. Incomplete applications will not be accepted.

For more information contact AOA HEHP staff member Uzma Zumbrink at 800-365-2219, ext. 4146 or UAZumbrink@aoa.org.

Healthy People 2010 Vision Objectives

- Increase the proportion of persons who have a dilated eye examination at appropriate intervals.
- Increase the proportion of preschool children age 5 years and under who receive vision screening.
- Reduce uncorrected visual impairment due to refractive errors.
- Reduce blindness and visual impairment in children and adolescents age 17 years and under.
- Reduce visual impairment due to diabetic retinopathy.
- Reduce visual impairment due to glaucoma.
- Reduce visual impairment due to cataract.
- Reduce occupational eye injury.
- Increase the use of appropriate personal protective eyewear in recreational activities and hazardous situations around the home.
- Increase vision rehabilitation.

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“As the founding sponsor of HEHP, Luxottica Group saw that HEHP programs would help many people in need, were important to optometry as a profession, and would give us the opportunity to work together and support optometrists and patients all over the country,” said Fay.

“Luxottica is extremely pleased to have helped HEHP reach this $1,000,000 milestone,” he said.

The HEHP grants fund activities that support the Healthy People 2010 vision objectives and goal to reduce health disparities.

Fay was pleased to hear that an aggressive promotion plan is in place to spread the word about the grants and programs that are being implemented at the grassroots level.

In addition, Luxottica has committed to providing internal resources to assist with promotion of this worthwhile initiative. Together, Luxottica and VSP have given $1 million to more than 200 projects in 46 states since the program’s inception in 2004.

For more information visit www.aoa.org/healthypml.
HEHP annual meeting stresses collaborative projects

The AOA announced the 2009 Healthy Eyes Healthy People® (HEHP) State Association Grants program at its seventh annual HEHP conference in St. Louis from Jan. 24-25.

The grants provide funding for implementation of activities that support the Healthy People 2010 vision objectives and goal to reduce health disparities.

The AOA administers the grants sponsored by Luxottica Group and VSP.

Luxottica Group Vice President of Industry Relations Henry Sand spoke to the HEHP Conference attendees about the company’s core value of helping those in need.

"Healthy Eyes Healthy People® touches us," he said. "We saw we could help a lot of people in need and also work together in supporting ODs all over the country."

Frank Fontana, O.D., spoke on behalf of VSP: "VSP recognizes what states do and is very proud to sponsor this and do it again next year."

Luxottica and VSP have given $1 million to more than 200 projects in 46 states since the program’s inception in 2004.

Each award is worth up to $5,000 in support of community-based education and health promotion projects that address the vision objectives defined in Healthy People 2010.

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) developed Healthy People 2010 to establish 10-year objectives to improve the health of Americans.

"With Healthy People, even though it’s coordinated and managed at the federal level, the stakeholder group is very large, which truly makes it a national objective," said HHS Senior Advisor Carter Blakey at the HEHP Conference.

Blakey also discussed the upcoming Healthy People 2020 initiative, which will focus on risk factors and determinants of health. Secondary objectives will focus on diseases and disorders.

Public comment on Healthy People 2020 is encouraged at www.healthy-people.gov or by e-mailing hp2020@hhs.gov.

Of the more than 400

"Who wouldn’t want to protect kids from tragic loss of vision when they go out to play?" he asked. "This is a very non-controversial issue."

Broad collaborations

Edwin Marshall, O.D., MPH, chair of the National Commission on Vision and Health, stressed the importance of Healthy Eyes Healthy People® at a time when the nation is embarking on health care reform.

"You can’t have economic recovery without considering health care reform," said Dr. Marshall. "And an integral part of that is vision. Healthy Eyes Healthy People® serves as a foundation for broad debate about vision care, community health and public policy."

HEHP Conference attendees also heard from Teryl Eisinger, director of the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health.

Eisinger reflected on the health care needs of those in non-urban areas and the distinctions of what makes an area non-urban.

"If there are more cows than people, it’s frontier," she said.

Eisinger focused on the need to establish relationships with other rural health care providers and educate them on optometry.

"You guys are doing primary care services, and we need to know about it," Eisinger said.

This collaboration is what the AOA is aiming for with its HEHP initiative.

The AOA is particularly interested in creative, collaborative projects with long-term potential.

"What we are looking for are projects that find new ways to collaborate with other organizations," said Timothy Wingert, O.D., associate director of the AOA Clinical Care Group. "This program is designed to reach out to those not in your chair, but to those who need your care."

Another important aspect of a project’s ability to reach out to those needing care is public awareness.

The Healthy Eyes Healthy People® Conference featured speakers with expertise in a wide-range of areas affecting eye and vision health initiatives. From left, AOA Clinical Care Group Associate Director Timothy Wingert, O.D., AOA President Pete Kehoe, O.D., HHS Senior Adviser Carter Blakey and Optometry’s Charity—the AOA Foundation board member Paul Berman, O.D.

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Representatives from the Hill & Knowlton public affairs firm provided guidance to conference attendees in terms of public relations and its value and tips for working with the media to promote the grant projects.

Break-out groups reviewed case studies to brainstorm on ways to enhance awareness for projects.

Conference attendees were reminded that the HEHP Grant Program is intended to stimulate community initiatives in health promotion and disease prevention.

The AOA recognizes the importance of strengthening the outreach of community-based organizations by providing seed money to begin or continue vision-related projects.

Applications for grants must be received by March 2. State associations will be notified of the decisions on April 14.

For more information on HEHP, including descriptions of past grant winners, visit www.aoa.org and search for "HEHP."