

Our organization sponsored a 14-month exhaustive nationwide survey of ongoing eye research in the United States, conducted at a cost of more than \$100,000. Our study director personally visited over 100 medical institutions, conducted discussions in depth with some 600 scientists, department heads and medical administrators, and completely documented the activities of nearly 300 ophthalmic investigators. The findings of that survey were published by our organization, Research to Prevent Blindness, Inc., in 1965 under the title "Ophthalmic Research: U.S.A."

We have also asked the Gallup organization to conduct a national opinion survey on many questions relating to vision, and this has provided insight into public attitudes and concepts which are important to legislators in acting to meet the needs of our people.

Moreover, through the years we have maintained continuous contact with the heads of eye research departments and ophthalmic investigators. Reports of their work are provided us annually by some 33 medical institutions which receive grants from our organization.

It is apparent to us now that serious visual disability is far more widespread than is generally recognized. The blind population of this country today has been estimated at anywhere from almost half a million people to more than a million, depending upon which of the many definitions of blindness is used.

The lack of accurate, authoritative statistics on visual disability is characteristic of the Nation's failure to come to grips realistically with the most fundamental aspects of this major health problem. In addition to our huge blind population, it is estimated that another 1½ million Americans are blind in one eye.

Ironically, such persons would not be considered blind at all by our present definitions. Most important to consideration of the legislation before this committee today is this fact: In the 20 years between 1940 and 1960, while the general population was increasing by 36 percent, our blind population increased by 67 percent. In terms of blindness alone, such statistics constitute a warning that we cannot ignore.

But blindness is only part of the problem—the ultimate condition of visual deprivation. On just the other side of the thin line that separates the legally blind from those with severe visual loss we find millions more living with minimal vision and in constant fear of losing the little sight they have.

It is estimated that 3½ million Americans suffer from serious, permanent, noncorrectable visual defects—one out of every seven families has at least one person so afflicted. More than 10 percent of all patients treated at general hospitals are eye patients, and this does not take into account the millions who are treated for eye conditions in the offices of physicians.

Just 45 of the Nation's medical schools recently reported to us that they alone performed more than 127,000 major eye operative procedures in the past year. We cannot even guess at how many operations would be performed had we the knowledge, the facilities, the financial resources, and the trained manpower to serve all for whom such surgery is indicated.

Let us step a little further back from these most acute cases of visual disability and observe that the general conditions that exist because