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Transitions Optical's Annual Employee Survey Reveals Aging Workforce Values Vision Benefit, But Doesn't Take Advantage of It

*Those at Highest Risk Missing Preventive Care Opportunity;
Study Uncovers Opportunities to Improve Overall Employee Education Efforts*

ORLANDO, Fla., Jan. 31, 2011 – The annual *Employee Perceptions of Vision Benefits* survey conducted by Transitions Optical, Inc. reveals that – despite reporting a strong interest in their company vision benefit – today's aging U.S. workforce isn't fully taking advantage of it, therefore missing out on a critical preventive care opportunity and leaving themselves at higher risk for age-related vision problems, eye diseases and chronic conditions that impact eye health and compromise productivity. Baby boomers (ages 45-64) are only slightly more likely than younger employees to enroll in their vision benefit (79 percent vs. 75 percent). Similarly, 34 percent of Baby boomers and 23 percent of those ages 65+ who enroll do not utilize their benefit to receive a comprehensive eye exam. The survey was conducted online by Synovate (Ipsos) in October 2011, among 2,011 full-time, adult U.S. employees whose employers offer vision benefits.

“A quality vision benefit is important for everyone, but especially for employees ages 45 and older, who are more likely to experience vision problems that hurt job performance. This

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age group also has a higher risk for developing costly eye diseases and whole body conditions such as diabetes and hypertension, all of which can be detected through comprehensive eye care, and addressed with the right eyewear to correct, enhance and protect vision,” said Pat Huot, director, managed vision care, Transitions Optical. “With ongoing medical cost concerns among employers and employees alike, our survey findings have flagged a serious lost opportunity to help lower potential healthcare expenditures and boost productivity, and for consumers to take greater control of their health outcomes in the future.”

While the survey showed slight improvement over the previous study, “not having vision or eye health problems” remained the most commonly cited reason for not enrolling in a vision plan (32 percent vs. 36 percent in the previous study) – showing a continued lack of understanding of the importance of preventative eye care.

Awareness of Vision and Aging

Nearly all employees (94 percent) agreed that they felt their vision benefit would become more important to them as they grew older. However, while the survey confirmed that employees’ actual experiences with many vision-related issues do increase with age, even older employees had limited awareness of these changes, many of which can be addressed with the right eyewear. For example, half of baby boomers were unaware that they may have more trouble seeing far away or seeing well in dim lighting as they grow older. Similarly, three in 10 were unaware of the increased risk for eye diseases such as cataract, glaucoma and macular degeneration.

Employees ages 65+ were slightly more aware of most age-related vision changes than baby boomers, although overall awareness was still limited. For instance, 32 percent were unaware that light sensitivity increases with age, and 81 percent were unaware that colors can seem less bright. Also, employees age 65+ were only slightly more likely to select diagnosis of chronic conditions as a reason why they enrolled in their vision benefit.

Interestingly, employees in the 18-44 age group were most likely to report that they find themselves needing to pause or take breaks at work because their eyes hurt or feel tired (33 percent), reinforcing that younger employees also have vision needs that can be addressed by a quality vision benefit.

Growing Interest in Eyewear Technology

Despite the limited awareness of the advantages of electing and utilizing vision coverage, the survey also revealed that employees – especially those ages 45 and older – do have a strong interest in the eyewear component of their plan.

For example, nearly 90 percent said it was important to them that their vision benefit covers new lens technologies, with employees age 45+ most likely to agree. Additionally, nearly three in four respondents said they would be more likely to keep using or enroll in their vision benefit if it covered premium lens options such as Transitions® lenses, with those in the 44-64 age group most likely to agree. These lenses adapt to changing light outdoors, reducing eyestrain and fatigue and protecting the eyes by blocking damaging UV rays.

“We know that the right vision correction can reduce productivity loss by 20 percent, and that employees value a comprehensive benefit that gives them options in lenses and frames,” Huot said. “This interest in new lens technologies can serve as a great angle to help employers pique employee interest in vision coverage and encourage them to visit their eyecare professional,” he added.

Opportunities to Increase Education on Vision Care, Vision Wear

The research findings suggest that employees – including at-risk, older employees – need further education from their employers on the value of the vision benefit, and identified several missed opportunities to provide this education.

Thirty percent of employees felt that their employers do not take appropriate steps to make sure employees understand their vision benefit.

In the latest survey, only 18 percent of employees reported that their employers do not communicate to them about their vision benefit, a small improvement from 25 percent in the 2011 survey. However, nearly 60 percent of employers provide only basic vision plan information during the open enrollment period. Just 13 percent of employees said their employers also include information on the importance of eye health, and only 11 percent do so regularly throughout the year, a slight increase over the previous survey finding.

The survey also delved deeper into employers' vision benefit education methods, and revealed that only 58 percent offer clear written materials about the costs and benefits of their vision plan, and only 34 percent include a presentation on what the plan covers. Other employee education methods – such as one-on-one employee benefit discussions, bringing in a benefits broker or health professional, or educating on vision benefits during a time other than open enrollment (such as during a health fair) were also largely underutilized.

Employee education materials about the value of vision care and vision wear through a vision benefit are available free of charge through the Transitions Healthy Sight Working for You program, in the tools section of www.HealthySightWorkingForYou.org. The site also includes the Healthy Sight Calculator, which allows employers to determine potential healthcare cost and productivity savings possible for their specific workforce through a comprehensive vision benefit. An individual version of the Healthy Sight Calculator is available to share directly with employees, to show them the time, money and sight that they could save through their vision benefit. It is directly accessible at www.HealthySightCalculator.org.

Key Findings on Vision Benefits

The following key findings were identified:

Type and Cost of Vision Plan Offered

- 1 in 5 respondents reported that their company fully pays for their vision plan.
- 6 in 10 respondents said that their company contributes to the cost, and they pay the rest.
- More than 1 in 10 respondents reported that they fully pay for their vision benefit.
- 3 in 10 said they are paying more for their vision plan than they have in the past.

Enrollment in and Usage of Vision Benefit

- 3 in 4 employees enrolled in their employer's vision benefit, showing no change over the 2010 survey. [Table 1]
- Employees offered a voluntary plan were less likely to enroll.
- Employees age 45+ were only slightly more likely to enroll.
- More than 3 in 10 enrolled employees said they did *not* use their vision benefit in the past year to pay for an eye exam for themselves, showing no change over the 2010 survey.
- Employees age 45-65 were only slightly more likely to have an eye exam than younger employees, and employees age 65+ were most likely to have received one. [Table 2]

Reasons for Enrolling in a Vision Benefit – Among Those Enrolled in a Vision Plan

- 3 in 4 employees said they chose to enroll in their employer's vision benefit for discounts on eye care and eyewear. [Table 3]
- Nearly 6 in 10 reported prevention, diagnosis and treatment of vision problems as a reason.
- Fewer (4 in 10) reported prevention, diagnosis and treatment of eye diseases as a reason.
- Only 1 in 4 respondents selected diagnosing or managing chronic disease as a reason, although employees age 65+ were more likely to do so.

Reasons for NOT Enrolling in a Vision Benefit – Among Those Who Did Not Enroll

- Compared to the previous survey, slightly fewer respondents (3 in 10) said they did not enroll in their employer's vision benefit because they don't have vision or eye health problems (decrease from 4 in 10 respondents in the 2010 survey). [Table 4]
- Fewer respondents said they did not enroll because they could not afford it, or because their employer does not pay for the benefit in full (15 percent vs. 25 percent in previous survey). Those offered a voluntary vision benefit were significantly more likely to report this.

Vision Benefits and Aging

- Nearly all respondents said their vision benefit would become more important to them as they age.
- Overall, employees age 45+ were more likely to be aware of the potential consequences of aging on the eye, such as more trouble seeing up close/far away, trouble seeing at night and increased eyestrain fatigue and light sensitivity. [Table 5]
- Overall, employees age 45+ were also more likely to experience these issues, with the exception of headaches from light and glare, which were most common among those ages 18-44. [Table 6]
- The 18-44 age group was most likely to report having to take breaks at work because their eyes hurt or felt tired (1 in 3 reported this).

Interest in and Usage of Eyewear Technologies

- Nearly 9 in 10 respondents said it is important to them that their vision benefit covers the latest lens technologies. Employees age 45+ were the most likely to agree. [Table 7]
- Nearly half of employees ages 45-64 report wearing bi-focal or progressive lenses, 1 in 3 report wearing anti-reflective coatings and impact-resistant materials, and 1 in 4 report wearing photochromics.
- Nearly 3 in 4 respondents said they would be more likely to keep using or enroll in their vision benefit if it covered premium lens options such as photochromic Transitions® lenses. [Table 8]

Quantity and Perceptions of Employee Communication Methods

- Fewer than 1 in 5 respondents said their employer does not communicate to them about their vision benefit, a slight improvement over 1 in 4 in the previous survey.
- 7 in 10 respondents said their employer communicates to them about their vision benefit only during the annual enrollment period.
- Only 1 in 10 said their employer also does so during other times throughout the year.
- Only 1 in 10 respondents said their employer includes information about the importance of eye health when explaining their vision benefit during annual enrollment.
- 1 in 5 employers includes a presentation by a broker or vision plan representative to help explain a company vision benefit to employees. [Table 9]
- Fewer than 1 in 10 included a presentation by a health professional.
- Fewer than 1 in 5 used a web or video presentation.
- Very few (3 percent) held a meeting during a time other than open enrollment, such as a health fair.
- 3 in 10 respondents do not agree that their employer takes appropriate measures to make sure they understand their vision plan, a decrease from 4 in 10 in the previous study. [Table 10]

ENROLLMENT IN AND USAGE OF VISION BENEFIT**Table 1**

Enrollment in employer benefits				
<i>Prompted</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Age 18-44</i>	<i>Age 45-64</i>	<i>Age 65+</i>
Medical	91%	91%	93%	84%
Dental	86%	86%	87%	83%
Vision	76%	75%	79%	73%
Life	65%	63%	68%	62%

Table 2

Did NOT use vision benefit to pay for all or part of each of the following for self in past year				
<i>Prompted among those enrolled</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Age 18-44</i>	<i>Age 45-64</i>	<i>Age 65+</i>
Comprehensive eye exam for self	34%	38%	34%	23%

EMPLOYEES ENROLLED IN VISION BENEFIT

Table 3

Reasons for enrolling in vision benefit (choose all that apply)				
<i>Prompted among those enrolled</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Age 18-44</i>	<i>Age 45-64</i>	<i>Age 65+</i>
Discounts on eye care and eyewear	74%	74%	74%	73%
Prevent, diagnose, treat vision problems	57%	57%	57%	60%
Provide eye care for family	46%	46%	50%	39%
Prevent, diagnose, treat eye diseases	40%	38%	41%	46%
Diagnose chronic diseases	25%	24%	25%	33%

EMPLOYEES NOT ENROLLED IN VISION BENEFIT*

Table 4

Reasons for not enrolling in vision benefit (choose all that apply)				
<i>Prompted among those not enrolled</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Age 18-44</i>	<i>Age 45-64</i>	<i>Age 65+</i>
Don't have vision/eye health problems	32%	43%	20%	18%
Discounts not enough to justify cost	31%	21%	39%	47%
Receive through family member's employer	17%	19%	19%	8%
Can't afford it/employer doesn't cover	15%	15%	17%	9%
Have private insurance/another plan	5%	2%	5%	17%
Premium lens/frame brands not covered	4%	4%	6%	3%
Eye/vision health problems addressed by general health physician	3%	2%	6%	4%
Employer did not explain vision benefit well enough	3%	3%	4%	-
Don't like to go to eye doctor	2%	2%	1%	-

Note: Responses of 1% or less are not shown in this table.

VISION AND AGING

Table 5

Awareness of how vision typically changes with age				
<i>Prompted</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Age 18-44</i>	<i>Age 45-64</i>	<i>Age 65+</i>
More trouble seeing up-close	67%	60%	75%	75%
More trouble seeing far away	53%	58%	48%	48%
Trouble seeing at night	66%	63%	69%	72%
Increased risk for eye diseases	65%	58%	69%	82%
More eyestrain	45%	45%	46%	42%
Need more light to see well	43%	35%	47%	58%
Dry eye	31%	27%	31%	43%
Light sensitivity	25%	24%	25%	28%
Colors seem less bright	18%	18%	16%	19%

Table 6

Experience with various vision issues				
<i>Prompted</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Age 18-44</i>	<i>Age 45-64</i>	<i>Age 65+</i>
Trouble seeing up-close	33%	12%	55%	55%
Trouble seeing far away	47%	52%	44%	36%
Trouble seeing at night	24%	20%	27%	31%
Eye disease	6%	3%	6%	17%
Eyestrain	19%	19%	22%	15%
Trouble seeing in dim light	16%	6%	23%	33%
Dry eye	15%	15%	13%	20%
Light sensitivity	13%	14%	12%	17%
Headaches caused by light and glare	10%	13%	7%	4%

INTEREST IN EYEWEAR TECHNOLOGIES**Table 7**

Perceived importance that a vision benefit includes the latest lens technologies				
<i>Prompted</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Age 18-44</i>	<i>Age 45-64</i>	<i>Age 65+</i>
Very/somewhat important	86%	84%	88%	87%
Not important	9%	11%	7%	9%
Not sure	5%	6%	5%	4%

Table 8

Would be more likely to keep using or re-enroll/enroll in vision benefit if it included premium lens options such as Transitions lenses				
<i>Prompted</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Age 18-44</i>	<i>Age 45-64</i>	<i>Age 65+</i>
Yes	71%	70%	76%	60%
No	30%	25%	35%	40%

QUANTITY AND PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION METHODS

Table 9

Methods used by employer to communicate to employees about their vision benefit	
<i>Prompted</i>	<i>Total</i>
Basic information only, provided during open enrollment	58%
Both basic/eye health information, provided during open enrollment	13%
Both basic/eye health information during open enrollment and also throughout the year	11%
Clear written materials about costs and benefits of plan	58%
Presentation on what vision plan covers	34%
One-on-one employee meetings to discuss benefit options	15%
Presentation by benefits broker or vision plan rep	20%
Visit from a health professional	8%
Video or web presentation	15%
Follow up contact following enrollment meeting	5%
Employer does not communicate about vision benefit	18%

Table 10

Agrees employer takes appropriate steps to make sure employees understand their vision benefit			
<i>Prompted</i>			
<i>Total</i>	<i>Age 18-44</i>	<i>Age 45-64</i>	<i>Age 65+</i>
69%	67%	68%	77%

ABOUT TRANSITIONS OPTICAL

Since Transitions Optical, headquartered in Pinellas Park, Fla., was founded more than 20 years ago, the company has been driven by an innovative spirit and a commitment to partnership. As the leading provider of photochromics to optical manufacturers, Transitions Optical offers state-of-the-art light management technology in virtually every major lens design and material encompassing a family of everyday adaptive lenses and performance sun lenses.

Everyday lens options include Transitions® lenses, which provide the optimal balance between outdoor darkness and indoor clarity; Transitions® XTRActive™ lenses which provide superior darkness outdoors; and the revolutionary Transitions® Vantage™ lenses, the first and only photochromic lenses to darken and polarize outdoors.

Transitions Optical's performance sunwear line includes a range of products customized in partnership with other best-in-class brands. Understanding that the right equipment can provide an advantage, the products are all designed to improve depth perception, clarify color and increase contrast for specific outdoor activities.

Transitions Optical is dedicated to promoting healthy sight worldwide and to supporting its partners and optical professionals with tools, programs and resources to aid in their individual efforts and help strengthen industry growth. For more information, visit Transitions.com/Pro, or contact Transitions Optical Customer Service at (800) 848-1506 (United States) or (877) 254-2590 (Canada).

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted by an online method using Synovate's online access panel, Global Opinion Panels. A total of 2,011 interviews were completed from September 29th to October 14th, 2010. All respondents were aged 18 years and above, and worked full time for employers that offered vision benefits. Quotas were set on ethnicity and age in order to have sufficient base sizes for sub-group analysis.

ABOUT IPSOS

Ipsos is a leading global survey-based market research company, providing public opinion research, loyalty, forecasting and modelling insights. With operations in 84 countries, Ipsos employs more than 15,000 research professionals and support staff, along with a network of telephone call centres and pre-recruited household and online panels. Ipsos offers a suite of research vehicles, all of which provide clients with actionable and relevant information. Staffed with seasoned research consultants with extensive industry-specific backgrounds, Ipsos offers syndicated information or custom solutions across key sectors, including consumer packaged goods, financial services, automotive, retail, and technology & telecommunications. To learn more, please visit www.ipsos.ca.

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