

Lions World Vision Institute Unveils Vision Health Center to Transform Community Eye Care in Tampa Bay

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Tampa Bay, FL (September 17, 2024) – In a visionary move to advance ocular health and education, the Lions World Vision Institute (LWVI) proudly announces the development of a new Vision Health Center in collaboration with the [USF Health Eye Institute](#).

This state-of-the-art facility, with 20,000 square feet of clinical and community space located in Ybor City, is expected to open in 2026 and will serve as a hub for top-tier vision care. The Vision Health Center will also become a national model for how to facilitate research and provide comprehensive services to underserved communities.

Since its inception, the Lions World Vision Institute has been a beacon of hope for over 500,000 individuals worldwide, restoring sight through cornea donation that enhances the quality of life for countless men, women, and children. Proudly headquartered in Tampa Bay, the Institute stands as the world's largest eye bank and as pioneers in sight restoration, innovators of groundbreaking research, and unwavering champions of prevention and education for those most in need.

LWVI's commitment to eradicating blindness and advancing eye health continues a promise made to Helen Keller when she issued a challenge in 1925 to Lions Clubs International, asking the service organization to become "Knights of the Blind in the crusade against darkness." For more than 50 years LWVI has answered this call and now expands their pledge through the Lions



World Vision Institute Foundation.

The LWVI Foundation has a focus on health equity and early vision intervention, especially with children. The Foundation is working to address alarming national statistics that one in four children has an undiagnosed vision problem, and one in five cannot afford the vision care they need.

Vision problems are directly linked to reading proficiency, which is concerning since one in six children who are not reading proficiently by third grade do not graduate from high school on time. According to the Florida Department of Education, less than 23% of third graders in Tampa's Hillsborough County read proficiently—compared to 25% in Florida and 44% in neighboring Pinellas County. For many of these students, a simple pair of glasses can transform their lives, improving their ability to learn and increasing their chances of success in school and beyond.

"It's clear that urgent action is needed," said Sharon Boyes, executive director of the LWVI Foundation. "Through the Vision Health Center we will be able to address critical gaps in vision health and ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed academically, physically, and beyond."

"The USF Health Eye Institute has a long, collaborative history with the Lions World Vision Institute and this new affiliation helps expand our impact through stronger coordination of eye care," said Dr. Charles J. Lockwood, executive vice president of USF Health and dean of the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine. "The passion of the Lions organization to fight blindness and eye disease, coupled with USF Health's expertise in therapies, treatments and research, will elevate the quality eye care provided throughout the region."

"The newly formed ties between USF Health and Lions World Vision Institute herald a new horizon in vision health for patients in the Tampa Bay area and beyond," said Dr. Ramesh Ayyala, professor and chair of the Department of Ophthalmology in the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine. "Experts at our USF Health Eye Institute stand ready to collaborate with the new Vision Health Center to provide advanced clinical eye care to the region while pursuing cutting-edge research, with the ultimate goal being the eradication of blindness."

In the past year, Lions and USF Health have signed a new, more comprehensive affiliation agreement, establishing systematic methods to work together in the fight against blindness and eye disease. This includes collaborative research, treatment, screening, diagnostic, and educational initiatives.

"For over 40 years, Lions and USF have worked together to serve those who are blind or visually impaired," said Jason Woody, CEO of LWVI. "Our collaboration with USF Health in the Vision Health Center will provide exceptional care, impacting thousands of children and adults in Tampa Bay and creating a model that can be replicated in other parts of the LWVI service area."

Support from the Tampa Bay community will be crucial in realizing the Vision Health Center and continuing the LWVI mission to illuminate lives and champion health equity. To learn more about how you can contribute, please visit the LWVI website <https://lwvi.org> or contact Sharon Boyes at Sharon.Boyes@lwvi.org.

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ABOUT LIONS WORLD VISION INSTITUTE

Lions World Vision Institute is a nonprofit organization committed to honoring vision as a basic human right. With our worldwide ecosystem of eye banks, surgeons, and research leaders, we work tirelessly to honor a donor's gift by protecting and supporting sight restoration for hundreds of thousands of people—transforming lives around the world.... So the world can see. For more information about Lions World Vision Institute, please visit www.LWVI.org.

ABOUT USF HEALTH

USF Health's mission is to envision and implement the future of health. It is the partnership of the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine, the College of Nursing, the College of Public Health, the Taneja College of Pharmacy, the School of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Sciences, the Biomedical Sciences Graduate and Postdoctoral Programs, and USF Health's multispecialty physicians' group. The University of South Florida, a high-impact research university dedicated to student success and committed to community engagement, generates an annual economic impact of more than \$6 billion. Through hundreds of millions of dollars in research activity each year, USF is a leader in solving global problems and improving lives. For more information, visit health.usf.edu.

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