



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Challenges for Blind and Visually Impaired
Explored During Upcoming Workshop**

GRAND RAPIDS – The ability to see is something that most people take for granted. Vision loss can be devastating as common tasks such as cooking, the ability to drive and reading the mail become difficult. This can take an emotional toll on a person. The Kent County Disaster Mental Health and Human Services Committee is planning a blind and visually impaired workshop on Friday, February 20, 2015. This interactive workshop is designed to increase awareness of accessibility differences among people who are blind, visually impaired and sighted. Implications for emergency preparedness and response will be explored at the workshop.

Visual impairments are very common and affect all age groups. However, vision loss tends to advance with age. According to CDC, more than one million Americans are legally blind and 12 million are visually impaired. Half of all blindness can be prevented and the risk of blindness can be reduced with early detection and treatment. National and local governments have established programs and regulations to prevent and control visual impairment, as well as developed campaigns with the purpose of educating and creating awareness about the importance of visual function.

“Not all visual impairments are the same, and we need to be prepared for the needs of our community in times of emergency incidents” explains Adam London, Administrative Health Officer of the Kent County Health Department. “It is important for emergency responders and public health staff to have a solid understanding of the various challenges in our community.”

Several speakers will be at the workshop, including a client advocate from the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, a sociology professor from Ferris State University and a safety and security coordinator at Clark Retirement Community.

The workshop is open to all community members, public service workers, local officials and many others. The workshop will be at the Kent County Health Department located at 700 Fuller Avenue NE in Grand Rapids on Friday, February 20, from 1:30-4:30 p.m. If you are interested in attending this workshop, please call Pat Draper at 616-632-7292 to reserve your seat.

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and three satellite clinics located in Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.