



Seva Canada receives international vision award for restoring sight to millions in developing world
Vancouver-based organization heralded for working toward eliminating preventable blindness and visual impairment worldwide

VANCOUVER, BC – September 8, 2015 – With more than 39 million people suffering from blindness worldwide and 80 per cent preventable or treatable, Vancouver-based international development organization Seva Canada is recognized for making a major difference around the globe. Seva has restored sight to 4 million people over the past 32 years and is now being internationally recognized for those efforts with the Antonio Champalimaud Vision Award.

“Most of the world’s blind will not walk into a hospital and request sight-restoring cataract surgery. They are too scared, too poor and don’t understand they can be helped, said Penny Lyons, Executive Director, Seva Canada.

Working in some of the most remote parts of some of the poorest countries in the world, like Madagascar, Tanzania, Cambodia, and Nepal, Seva provides communities with access to high-quality eye care and the tools and training locals need to administer this care to their own people. Rather than simply setting up temporary treatment centres, Seva’s model provides a long-term vision care solution to help the local communities treat and prevent blindness themselves for generations to come.

In addition to their international efforts, Seva Canada’s research initiatives have led to strategies to overcome gender, economic and geographic barriers to ensure universal access to eye care is available for all. For example, it was discovered that cataracts, the leading cause of vision loss worldwide, were disproportionately impacting women. This statistic was only identified because of Seva Canada’s research, which found that women develop cataracts at the same frequency as men, but because they have less access to available services, the effects are much more severe.

“Two-thirds of blind people worldwide are women and Seva Canada’s programs are designed specifically to develop strategies to reduce gender inequity and provide the necessary care to women and girls,” said Lyons. “Women and children are not able to travel freely and in most cases will stay blind until eye care comes to their doorstep. Simple strategies are often the most effective in overcoming the barriers women and girls face in accessing care. Strategies such as: providing counseling to the families, offering free transportation, and bringing eye care to the villages through community eye centres.”

This year, their efforts in Eastern Africa have won them and their partner organizations, Seva Foundation and the Kilimanjaro Centre for Community Ophthalmology (KCCO), the prestigious Antonio Champalimaud Vision Award. Considered the “*Nobel Prize*” of the vision care world, the Champalimaud award is presented for outstanding contributions towards the prevention and alleviation of blindness and visual impairment, primarily in developing countries.. It includes a cash prize of one million Euros, which will be shared by the three organizations.

“Connecting people in developing countries with the eye care services they require is accomplished by overcoming the financial and social barriers that prevent people from accessing care,” said Dr. Ken Bassett, Seva Canada Program Director “Seva’s strong support for population-based studies has allowed us to make significant contributions to global knowledge about how to reach populations in need, and provide them with essential eye care services. I think Seva is being recognized because we are a small office with a few dedicated staff that have had a huge impact on eye care around the world. Seva is innovative, catalytic, supportive and humbly proud of the great institutes we have helped to create. “

A leader in effective and ground-breaking approaches to eye care in developing countries, Seva Canada intends to use its share of the Champalimaud Award prize money to further strengthen the capacity of its eye care programs, increase service delivery, focus on universal access and generate evidence and strategies to continue restoring sight to people in need.

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About Seva Canada

Seva Canada is a Vancouver-based charitable organization whose mission is to restore sight and prevent blindness in the developing world.

Seva believes that giving sight to a blind person is the most effective way to relieve suffering, reduce poverty and transform lives. Seva works in many of the world’s poorest places: Nepal, Tibetan Areas of China, India, Malawi, Madagascar, Congo-Brazzaville, Benin, Burundi, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Guatemala, Cambodia and Egypt.

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