

### OUR **30**<sup>TH</sup> CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF SERVICE TO ARMENIA

STRENGTHENING REGIONAL CARE TO MAKE EYE CARE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

THE ANATOMY OF AECP AECP FROM A TO Z



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## A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER



It's unbelievable to me that it's been 30 years since I visited Armenia for the very first time. In 1992, I received a call, in the form of a fax, from the country's Ministry of Health. It asked Armenian-American physicians in the U.S. to help fight the growing wave of blindness in Armenia.

Armenia was war-torn and still reeling from a tragic earthquake. The country and its people needed help. Countless residents were injured – many with serious eye injuries – and needed treatment quickly. With \$10,000 worth of medical supplies in hand, I flew to Armenia a few weeks after receiving that call. During my trip, I treated roughly 300 patients and performed 40 surgeries. Soon after, I founded the Armenian EyeCare Project.

For me, seeking out Armenia and helping to modernize its eye care delivery system is a commitment I made to my grandfather as a 12-year-old boy. I promised him I would assist my ancestral homeland when they were in need. Three decades later, I am in awe of what this organization has grown to be.

The Armenian EyeCare Project has given me an enormous sense of purpose and good feeling. It has truly been the honor of a lifetime. Of course, all our accomplishments would not be possible without the committed group of volunteer physicians



who have joined on regular mission trips to the country; our local colleagues in Armenia who have done phenomenal work with the advanced medical education and training they've received; and our countless supporters who make all our sight-saving initiatives possible.

I am immensely proud of what the Armenian EyeCare Project has accomplished and the service it continues to provide for the people of Armenia and beyond. Thank you sincerely for being a part of it.

With gratitude, always,

oper Chanesian m

Roger Ohanesian Founder and President

## IT HAS TRULY BEEN THE HONOR OF A LIFETIME.

#### Volunteer Physicians

Dr. Anthony Aldave Dr. John Apisson Dr. Arpi Avakian Dr. Zaree Babahanian Dr. Dwayne Baharozian Dr. Robert Bedrosian Dr. George Bohigian Dr. Paul Chen Dr. Sanford Chen Dr. Howard Conn Dr. Emmett Cunningham Dr. Mary Davidian Dr. Elias Ekedi Dr. Troy Elander Dr. Steve Feldon Dr. Robert Fisher Dr. Karine Gabrielian Dr. John Griffin Dr. Ruben Grigoryan Dr. Mireille Hamparian Dr. Grigor Harutunyan Dr. Richard Hill Dr. Edward Holland Dr. John Hovanesian Dr. Kenneth Jaegers Dr. Thomas Johnson Dr. Basilio Kalpakian Dr. Michael Kapamajian Dr. Richard Kasper Dr. Barach Kupperman Dr. Thomas Lee Dr. Nubar Manoukian Dr. John Merrian Dr. John Michon Dr. Larry Najarian Dr. Harry Oganesyan Dr. Roger V. Ohanesian Dr. Edward O'malley Dr. Matt Parson Dr. Elizabeth Raab Dr. Khodam Rostomian Dr. Reid Schindler Dr. Lee Shahinian Dr. Aisha Simjee Dr. James Smith Dr. Sarkis Soukiasian Dr. Michael Vrabec Dr. Matthew Wade Dr. Sui Chien Wong Dr. Meyer Yepremyan

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## THE ARMENIAN EYECARE PROJECT



Magazine copy by Adriana Dermenjian and Anna Dira-Ananyan Design by Andrew Ohanesian Photos by Art Simon

## NEXTGEN PROGRAM STARTS BACK UP

fter a two-year hiatus due to the Coronavirus, we are happy to announce that our Next Generation Fellowship Program, which brings promising young doctors from Armenia to the U.S. for advanced medical education and training, has started up again. This year, five fellows will travel to the U.S. for fellowships in their specialties.

Dr. Tatevik Adamyan, who specializes in retina, was the first NextGen Fellow to arrive. In February she began her threemonth fellowship at Retina EyeCare in Seattle under the mentorship of Dr. Arpi Avakian. She then traveled south to continue her observership at Retina Consultants of Nevada under the guidance of Dr. Meher Yepremian.

After her fellowship ended in May, Dr. Adamyan said of the experience: "It was a big honor for me to be selected as one of AECP's NextGen Fellows. My days were full with consultations, exams and observing surgeries. My goal was to learn as much as possible in my specialty so when I return to Armenia I can do my best for my patients and of course share my updated knowledge with my colleagues and residents in the country. I'm very thankful to the AECP to have given me this great opportunity. With it I will do my best for my country."

More Armenian ophthalmologists will also make their way to the U.S. for AECP fellowships this year. Dr. Artak Kirakosyan arrived in July for his three-month cornea fellowship at the Jules Stein Eye Institute at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA.)

"My goal is for the NextGen Program to be a continuation of the original AECP Fellowship Program, the first generation of ophthalmologists in Armenia who had U.S. fellowships with AECP," Dr. Kirakosyan says. "Each fellowship opportunity and practical exchange program is critical for the development of local doctors in Armenia. This program will help realize my dream."



ASTGHIK GHAZARYAN RETINA University of California Irvine (UCI) February 2022- 2024



TATEVIK ADAMYAN RETINA Retina EyeCare, Seattle Retina Consultants of Nevada



ZARA DRAVAJYAN CORNEA Jules Stein Eye Institute, UCLA September-December 2022



ARAKS DAVTYAN CORNEA Jules Stein Eye Institute, UCLA September-December 2022

"The NextGen Program, for me, is a unique opportunity to upgrade my clinical knowledge and professional skills and ultimately to grow and progress in the ophthalmology world. It is every doctor's dream." -AECP Fellow Dr. Zara Dravajyan

> Later, in September, Drs. Zara Dravajyan and Araks Davtyan will arrive for their fellowships, which will also specialize in cornea and take place at the Jules Stein Eye Institute at UCLA. All three fellows will observe under the mentorship of Dr. Anthony Aldave.

"The NextGen Program, for me, is a unique opportunity to upgrade my clinical knowledge and professional skills and ultimately to grow and progress in the ophthalmology world," Dr. Dravajyan says. "It is every



ARTAK KIRAKOSYAN CORNEA Jules Stein Eye Institute, UCLA July-October 2022

doctor's dream."

Dr. Dravajyan also has a plan upon returning to Armenia: "Since there is no cornea department in the clinic where I work, it would be my personal mission and privilege to open a cornea center there upon returning from my fellowship."

Dr. Davtyan also discusses her goals by participating in the NextGen Program. "One of my fundamental goals in my career and in my life is to be a useful and caring person and to be of service to my country," she says. "Because of this program I can accomplish this lifelong goal in ways that I have so far only dreamed."

In addition to the four NextGen Fellows arriving in the U.S. this year, another Armenian ophthalmologist, Dr. Astghik Ghazaryan will complete a twoyear fellowship in her specialty of retina. Dr. Ghazaryan arrived in the U.S. in February and is observing at the University of California Irvine (UCI) under the mentorship of Dr. Barry Kuppermann.

We are thrilled to reinstate our fellowship program for these talented Armenian physicians and give them the opportunity to receive advanced medical education and intensive training in their specialties. These AECP Fellows will then return to Armenia and be able to provide the highest quality eye care to their patients.

### SPONSOR AN EYE CARE FACILITY

Polyclinic	\$30,000
Eye Examination Clinic	\$100,000
Eye Examination Clinic with diabetes tier	\$150,000
Eye Examination Clinic with diabetes & training tiers	\$175,000

# IMPROVING REGIONAL EYE CARE

Our mission to make eye care accessible to every resident continues as we develop additional eye care facilities across Armenia

A rmenia is a country consisting of roughly three million people. While a third of the population – one million – live in the country's capital (Yerevan), the remaining two-third – two million – reside in other regions of the country, spread throughout 10 provinces.

The mission of the AECP has always been to address eye care comprehensively and make care accessible to every child and adult in the country, no matter their location. We began addressing the need to reach all regions of Armenia with our Mobile Eye Hospital, a state-of-the -art surgical suite on wheels that travels throughout the country and provides eye care at no cost for those who otherwise would not have access.

In addition to our Mobile Eye Hospital, we have also most recently been able to develop five Regional Eye Centers throughout Armenia. These centers are located in five separate provinces of Armenia - Shirak, Lori, Tavush, Vayots Dzor and Syunik - and provide cutting-edge care to residents in these regions.

Now our mission to make eye care accessible to every resident of Armenia continues with the news that we will be developing more eye care facilities spread across all regions of the country. This includes the development of five Eye Examination Clinics in the remaining five provinces of Armenia where there are currently no Regional Eye Centers: Aragatsotn, Kotayk, Gegharkunik, Armavir and Ararat. It also includes the strengthening of up to 50 smaller polyclinics that will span across all 10 provinces of Armenia.

Through the development of these additional care facilities, all of Armenia's regions will get access to life-changing quality eye care services and be able to detect eye disease early and prevent complications locally without the need to travel to another province or the country's capital. These facilities will offer a sustainable, long-term solution

Cont'd on pg. 28



# DR. ROGER OHANESIAN

## AECP FOUNDER RECEIVES HUMANITARIAN AWARD

AECP Founder Dr. Roger Ohanesian accepts the ASCRS Foundation's Chang-Crandall Humanitarian Award from Dr. David Chang. Very year, the foundation behind the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery (ASCRS) selects an honoree for its coveted ASCRS Foundation Chang-Crandall Humanitarian Award, which is awarded to those who have made outstanding humanitarian achievements in the field of eye care.

This year the ASCRS Foundation has chosen our very own Founder and President Dr. Roger Ohanesian as the recipient of its 2022 ASCRS Foundation Chang-Crandall Humanitarian Award for his life-changing work in Armenia through the Armenian EyeCare Project (AECP.)

"The AECP has given me an enormous sense of purpose and good feeling and has been the honor of a lifetime," Dr. Ohanesian says. "To be recognized and lauded by my own colleagues within ASCRS for my 30 years of devotion to this cause is very gratifying. I would be remiss if I did not include the many ophthalmologists who have joined me multiple times to bring advanced diagnostic and surgical techniques to our grateful colleagues in Armenia. I am in awe of what we have accomplished and immeasurably proud of how far this program has come."

Dr. Ohanesian accepted his award during the 2022 ASCRS Annual Meeting, which took place April 22-26 in Washington D.C. The award was also endowed by a generous \$50,000 gift from Dr. and Mrs. David and Victoria Chang, which Dr. Ohanesian earmarked for the AECP.

"The number of lives that have been touched and forever changed by Dr. Ohanesian is immeasurable," the Foundation said. "We are inspired by his career and honored to bestow the 2022 ASCRS Foundation Chang-Crandall Humanitarian Award to Dr. Ohanesian for his contributions to ophthalmology and the world."

Dr. Ohanesian's colleagues also share great appreciation for the AECP Founder's incredible accomplishments. "For 30 years Roger has dedicated his life to helping people rise above blindness half a world away," says Dr. John Hovanesian, a fellow ophthalmologist who has traveled to Armenia as a volunteer physician with the AECP since 1997. "He's been passionate, he's been persistent and he's been extremely efficient in gathering resources and recruiting like-minded volunteers through his contagious enthusiasm and folksy charm. He has been completely unselfish, seeking to recognize others for their contributions rather than drawing attention to his own. But make no mistake: he has been remarkably effective, in the early years at addressing existing disease and more recently at supporting preventive measures. In Armenia his name is spoken with the greatest reverence. Very few of us will ever leave a mark on this world as important as that of Roger Ohanesian."

The AECP humbly thanks the ASCRS Foundation for recognizing our founder Dr. Roger Ohanesian for his selfless service in Armenia for the past 30 years. We also congratulate our beloved Dr. Ohanesian for this impeccable accomplishment! What an incredible way to celebrate our organization's 30th anniversary milestone year!

# **30 YEARS OF THE AECP**

# 1992

### A CALL FOR HELP

Dr. Roger Ohanesian gets a fax from Armenia seeking U.S. doctors for help. The nation is torn by war, a deadly earthquake and other hardships. Many residents are struggling, injured and in need of care.

### ROGER'S FIRST TRIP TO ARMENIA

Dr. Ohanesian boards a plane for Armenia. He brings with him \$10,000 worth of supplies and gets to work. He treats about 300 patients and performs 40 surgeries.







### **OPENING SUBSPECIALTY CLINICS**

AECP Fellows return to Armenia to establish clinics in their specialty and train staff. By 2004, a retina, glaucoma, corneal-uveitis and neuro-orbital clinic are all opened in Yerevan. In 2005, a Low Vision Center is also opened.



It becomes clear physicians in Armenia need advanced education and training to treat their patients independently and with the highest quality care. A Fellowship Program is developed, bringing Armenia's top ophthalmologists to the U.S. to train in their specialties.

### **2003** ESTABLISHING A MOBILE EYE HOSPITAL

Those who live outside of Armenia's capital are also in need of care. The idea to develop a mobile facility is born. In 2003, the AECP Mobile Eye Hospital begins its service, touring Armenia and providing eye care at no cost.





### **REINFORCING REGIONAL CARE**

Our mission continues as we develop more eye care mechanisms across the country. This includes the development of five Eye Exam Clinics and up to 50 polyclinics, strengthening the eye care delivery system throughout Armenia.



### ADDRESSING CHILDHOOD BLINDNESS

In 2010, the AECP begins its Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) Program, saving thousands of premature infants from going blind. Soon after the AECP Center of Excellence for the Prevention of Childhood Blindness is opened in Yerevan.

### FIGHTING DIABETIC EYE DISEASE

With many diabetics in Armenia, the AECP launches a Diabetes Program to prevent diabetic eye disease. Screening diabetics and providing follow-up care if needed, the intention of this program is to avoid blindness among those with diabetes through early intervention.



### **DEVELOPING EYE CENTERS IN REGIONS**

The AECP begins to develop five eye centers in regions of Armenia where they're needed most. These Regional Eye Centers provide greater access to eye care on a more consistent basis. By 2020, all five centers are opened.





### STRENGTHENING PEDIATRIC EYE HEALTH

The AECP has conducted eye screenings for children in schools since 2004, but a largerscale program was developed more recently. In 2021, a USAID grant made it possible to launch a comprehensive pediatric program for schoolchildren aged 6-16.

# BABY VALENTINA'S

Ver 10 years ago, babies born prematurely in Armenia simply didn't survive. As new and advanced ways to take care of premature infants allowed these babies to survive, many of them developed a progressive eye disease called Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP), which can lead to blindness if left untreated.

When a baby is born premature, oftentimes they must be placed in an incubator. With the high levels of oxygen in this device, sometimes blood vessels in these infants may grow abnormally. When blood vessels grow on the retina, it can cause the retina to bleed and contract, leading to retinal detachment and blindness.

Valentina is one such baby in Armenia who was born premature. At birth, her lungs were not fully developed and in order for her to breathe, she had to be kept in an incubator. Like many premature infants, baby Valentina was diagnosed with Retinopathy of Prematurity.

Valentina's parents noticed a problem with their newborn's vision right away. "When we offered her a bottle of milk or an object, she couldn't find it," Valentina's father, Amir, said.

"When she was asleep, she was in the dark. And when she would wake up, she was still in the dark," Valentina's mother, Lusine said. "I think it was that fear of darkness that would make her cry." A family dealing with the possibility of their premature baby becoming blind is incredibly devastating. "The mothers and fathers are already distraught that their baby was born early," AECP Volunteer Physician Dr. Thomas Lee says. "Then to layer on top of that a child who is blind can be more than the family can bear."

The AECP's ROP Program began in 2010, when we noticed an overwhelming number of blind babies in Armenia. AECP Founder Dr. Roger Ohanesian met with the Director of The Vision Center at Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA), **Dr. Thomas Lee**, and asked if he would come to Armenia.

"I remember thinking 'I can't say no to this person. This is too important," Dr. Lee says. "And within six months, I was in Yerevan and it was probably the most important thing I've ever done with my medical degree... It's really been a privilege to be part of this program and train doctors on how to save children from going blind."

The same physicians in Armenia who have been trained by Dr. Lee and other experts in their field are the ones who performed the ROP surgery on baby Valentina. The surgery -- performed at the AECP's Center of Excellence for the Prevention of Childhood Blindness in Yerevan -- was a success. Valentina's sight was saved.

"After the surgery she opened her eyes and was in awe," Valentina's mother said. "She was grabbing and touching everything. I was crying tears of joy."

"She no longer searched for the milk bottle," Valentina's father added. "Most importantly she is no longer living in darkness. She is now an able-bodied person ready to conquer every challenge in her life and I believe that she will."

Valentina's mother says she notices a difference in Valentina's temperament too. "She is very active and happy now," she says. "Her vision puts a smile on her face and lights up her eyes."

Valentina's parents are extraordinarily grateful that their daughter's sight has been saved. They are especially grateful to the supporters of the AECP for making it all possible.

"Because of them, my child can see," Valentina's mother says with a wide smile.

"She is no longer living in darkness. She is now an able-bodied person ready to conquer every challenge in her life and I believe that she will." -Amir, Valentina's father

## AECP STRENGTHENS PEDIATRIC EYE CARE



uilding on our long-term record of successful partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in July 2021, the Armenian EyeCare Project received a three-year grant from the agency to enhance pediatric eye health services in five regions of Armenia through our already established Regional Eye Centers.

Through this grant the AECP is implementing a comprehensive eye screening and treatment program for schoolchildren aged 6-16 in 15 urban and rural communities throughout Armenia. We are once again bringing the best international practices in modern pediatric eye care to Armenia and offering treatment of potentially sight-threatening eye disorders that would otherwise have a detrimental effect on the quality of life and overall performance of children. As well this program also supports Armenia's national goal of improving the health of children and adolescents with a potential to grow into replicable, scalable and sustainable interventions to prevent childhood blindness not only in Armenia, but also in neighboring countries.



Since this initiative began in July 2021, more than 3,000 schoolchildren in Armenia have been screened! Urgent and serious issues are faced by thousands of Armenian children in need of quality eye care to prevent complications from undetected and untreated eye diseases in the future. According to statistics, a vast number of children in Armenia begin school without an eye exam despite a full checkup being required by the country's Ministry of Health. Data obtained through the AECP/Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) School Screening Survey done in 2018-2020 showed that 49.8% of parents of children with visual impairment were not aware of their children's vision problems and learned about it for the first time during the screening activities of the project.

If corrected early more than 80% of eye problems can be treated leading to improved learning and better school performance. Early intervention through screening and treatment prevents vision loss and allows children to live healthy and productive lives. Conversely, severe visual impairment impedes children's educational and social growth and overall participation in their community.

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# ADOPT-AOULAGE AND BE THE REASON THOUSANDS RECEIVE EYE CARE



Our Adopt-a-Village Program has been the reason hundreds of thousands of adults and children across Armenia have been able to get the eye care they so desperately need.

The idea is simple: an individual or group selects a village in Armenia to adopt. Our Mobile Eye Hospital, while making its tour through Armenia, gets stationed near the adopted village and provides eye care – at no cost – to residents of the village aboard our mobile clinic. The care, spanning from comprehensive eye screenings to treatment including sightsaving surgery, is sponsored by the donor.

Since the majority of residents who live in the villages of Armenia cannot afford eye care themselves, access to this care makes a huge difference in their lives, all made possible by their sponsors.

Since beginning our Adopt-a-Village program, more than 200 villages in Armenia have been adopted by donors, resulting in hundreds of thousands of Armenians who have received care and would otherwise not have had it.

So far this year, 19 villages in Armenia have been adopted. This includes the adoption of five villages by the Armenian Artists Project, an organization founded by the late Jim Mouradick, a longtime supporter and friend of the AECP. Other groups who have sponsored villages through our Adopt-a-Village Program include the Armenian Renaissance Association, the Racine Armenian Coalition and more.



Though off to a good start, we are still in need of many villages in Armenia to be sponsored. Villages can be adopted by groups or individuals and make wonderful gifts and memorials. The cost of adoption ranges from several hundred to several thousand dollars, depending on the population of the village and the number of days our Mobile Eye Hospital is stationed nearby.

After treating residents from your adopted village we will also send you a report with the results of the eye examinations and surgeries along with photos and stories from some of the patients treated. We will also have a plaque made with your name placed in the village center.

Please consider adopting a village and making a true difference in the lives of thousands of adults and children in Armenia through your sponsorship. You can lift up an entire community. To view the villages available for adoption, visit www.eyecareproject.com/donations/adopt-a-village

## YOU CAN LIFT UP AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY



# A PARTNERSHIP WITH FRENCH PHYSICIANS

Ар. М.Артаковна

The AECP partners with French groups to establish an Armenian-French Ophthalmic School in Armenia.

hroughout its 30-year history, the Armenian EyeCare Project has always placed great value on establishing and maintaining strategic partnerships to expand our organization's capacity and reach; developing a quality care system in Armenia; and educating the public to improve the overall wellbeing and health of Armenians. Together with our partners, through the years we have built a wealth of knowledge and expertise in the field of ophthalmology in Armenia and even expanded into interrelated areas like pediatrics, diabetes, public health and more.

Our recent cooperation with French NGO Lumière Française is another vivid example of a partnership that will result in increased benefits and value for the population of Armenia. The AECP has partnered with Lumière Française to establish an Armenian-French Ophthalmic School in Armenia, which will be used to improve the skills and knowledge of local physicians by offering a series of training courses and handson practice opportunities for ophthalmologists in the country.

Lumière Française works through its partner organization Assistance Publique–Hôpitaux de Paris (AP-HP), which is the largest hospital system in Europe and one of the largest in the world, providing health care, education, research, prevention and emergency medical service in 52 branches of medicine.

AECP's joint program with Lumière Francaise and AP-HP kicked off at the end of April in Gyumri, Armenia's second-largest city. During this time, retinal surgeries were performed at the John **Ohannes Khachigian AECP** Regional Eye Center, making it the second location in Armenia, after Yerevan, where such surgeries are done. There were also a series of lectures by Armenian and French ophthalmologists, hands-on training through patient examinations, assessments of complicated cases, observation of surgeries and more.



### ARMENIAN - FRENCH OPHTHALMIC SCHOOL

During the four-day event, French and Armenian lecturers covered topics related to the anterior (cataract) and posterior (retina) segments of the eye and organized a series of workshops. Among healthcare officials, partners and physicians, the event gathered promising ophthalmologists who have been in practice for years and are working to master specialties in ophthalmology and share their experience internationally. The event concluded with WetLab training and a conference attended by over 100 ophthalmologists offline and about 100 online.

In addition to the hands-on training and lectures, these ophthalmologists will also have fellowship opportunities in France to deepen their skills and share their acquired knowledge with colleagues upon their return to Armenia. A total of four missions are expected to take place this year through this joint project, focusing on various areas of ophthalmology.

"AECP has been implementing various development programs in Armenia for the past 30 years," AECP Country Director Nune Yeghiazaryan said. "Taking into consideration the commitment and potential benefits of our partnership with Lumière Française and AP-HP, I am confident that this school will become another successful program in the field of ophthalmology."

According to Guillaume Narjollet, Counsellor for Cooperation and Cultural Affairs at the French Embassy in Armenia, healthcare is one of the most important areas of cooperation for the French Embassy in Armenia. "The Armenian-French collaboration provides opportunities to further develop the field of ophthalmology, especially in the regions, ensuring availability of quality ophthalmological services far beyond the capital, Yerevan," Narjollet said.

"The professional development of Armenian ophthalmologists through academic exchange as well as clinical cases and lab training is an extraordinary opportunity and this first success seems very promising to me and my colleagues," AP-HP International Relations Director Florence Veber said.

Though the focus of these training courses is to provide learning opportunities for regional ophthalmologists in the Shirak province of Armenia as well as physicians involved in the AECP Regional Eye Centers, ophthalmologists all over Armenia are also expected to benefit from this partnership.

# PREVENTING BLINDNESS FROM DIABETES

he AECP's Diabetes Program, which aims to prevent diabetic eye disease among those with diabetes in Armenia, was launched in 2017 thanks to support from the World Diabetes Foundation (WDF.) Due to the program's success, WDF has decided to continue its support of this life-changing initiative with another cycle of funding.

Targeting low-income individuals, many patients with diabetes in Armenia have already received access to eye screenings and advanced treatment if needed through our program. This ongoing support is based on the need to respond to the alarming statistics: that roughly nine percent of Armenia's population has diabetes, which leaves about 270,000 people at risk for diabetic retinopathy and possible blindness if their disease is not controlled. (Data: World Bank; 2011 statistics.)

Since our Diabetes Program began in 2017 up until 2020, more than 50,000 patients in Armenia have been screened; about 8,500 have been diagnosed with some type of diabetes-related eye disease and over 1,200 people have received treatment. As well, about 1,200 medical staff have been trained.

Since this second cycle of funding was provided by WDF in 2020, nearly 20,000 patients have been screened; about 1,400 have been diagnosed with some type of diabetes-related eye disease and over 850 have been treated through laser procedure or muchneeded cataract surgery.

Other highlights include the development and adoption of the prevention of diabetes and its complications as a national strategy by Armenia's Ministry of Health. This recognition by the Armenian government will make way for much more work to be done in the preventative care sector.

We have also made progress in

opportunities to colleagues.

We are also working to develop a software for diabetic retinopathy as well as a trilingual online learning platform for healthcare providers who work with diabetes prevention, management and treatment. This includes ophthalmologists, endocrinologists, family medicine doctors and nurses. The platform will be available through the cloud, offering open access to all education materials on the management of pre-diabetes and

### **ABOUT 70,000 DIABETICS HAVE BEEN SCREENED FOR DIABETIC EYE DISEASE SINCE OUR PROGRAM BEGAN**

developing a regional training hub for medical staff -- both in Armenia and outside of the country -- to have opportunities for training in Fundus Camera use and management; laser procedures and more. The hub will be built alongside our existing WetLab, located in the Malayan Ophthalmologic Center in Yerevan. It will be run by trained professionals and offer training diabetes that are developed by the AECP and our partners.

With these exciting developments, we continue our work to stop diabetic eye disease through prevention and early intervention. Through AI technology and other cutting-edge approaches, we can eliminate much of diabetes-related eye disease, avoiding vision loss and blindness among diabetics.

Due to the great success of our Diabetes Program, the World Diabetes Foundation has decided to continue its support of this lifechanging program with a second cycle of funding.

## MEDICAL MISSION AND GALA

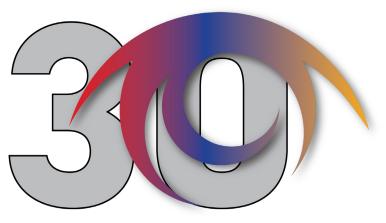
### **SEPTEMBER 18-28, 2022** *Yerevan, Armenia*

e are gearing up for our special 30th Anniversary Medical Mission in Armenia and welcome all ophthalmologists and health care providers as well as friends of the AECP to join us!

The AECP's 62nd Medical Mission will take place September 18-28, 2022 and will celebrate our organization's 30-year-long dedication to healthcare in Armenia. Activities will include visits to the AECP Center of Excellence for the Prevention of Childhood Blindness, Mobile Eve Hospital, Regional Eye Centers and newly opened AECP Eye Examination Clinic. As well, AECP volunteer physicians will hold master classes and discuss cases with their Armenian peers; organize hands-on training sessions in RetCam and fundus camera use and perform simulation exercises together.

As part of our Medical Mission we will also hold our 20th International Conference in Yerevan. Organized in collaboration with Armenia's Ministry of Health, Children's Hospital Los Angeles, the World Diabetes Foundation and a number of medical associations in Armenia, the conference will include lectures, discussions, master classes and workshops for health care providers including ophthalmologists, family medicine doctors, general pediatricians, neonatologists and many others.

The first part of the Conference will be dedicated to ophthalmology and take place September 23-25. Topics will include glaucoma, refractive surgery, retinal disease, neuroophthalmology and oculoplastics, pediatric ophthalmology and corneal disorders.



### **The Armenian EyeCare Project** Celebrating 30 Years of Bringing Sight to Armenian Eyes

The second part of the Conference will focus on pediatrics, neonatology and endocrinology and take place September 29 to October 5. Workshops will be organized for pediatricians, neonatologists and pediatric endocrinologists. Armenian specialists and foreign peers will give presentations from their own experience and hold talks on new methods of pediatric disease diagnostics and treatment.

Conference speakers will include lecturers from Armenia and physicians from top universities and hospitals in the U.S. and Europe. All materials and lectures from the conference will be available on the AECP-CHLA Online Pediatric Educational Network (OPEN), which will give a unique self-education opportunity to physicians and healthcare providers from all over the world.

If you are interested in participating in the AECP's Medical Mission or Conference, please email info@eyecareproject.com. We look forward to celebrating our momentous 30th anniversary with you in Armenia!

### **NOVEMBER 19, 2022** *Newport Beach, California*

The AECP is also thrilled to announce that we are going back to in-person events this year! And what better time than our 30th anniversary? This fall, we want to make up for the past two years and celebrate together again with our milestone 30th Anniversary Gala!

On Saturday November 19, 2022, we will gather with dear friends and supporters at the Balboa Bay Resort in Newport Beach, California and celebrate 30 years of service in Armenia.

The evening will include an exquisite cocktail reception, delectable five-course dinner, lively Armenian music, thrilling auctions and much more. So dust off your tuxedo or cocktail dress and get ready to celebrate. We can't imagine commemorating such a meaningful milestone for the AECP without you by our side. Save the date and we'll see you soon!

## OUR DEEPEST GRATITUDE TO All our 2021 donors

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### Pediatric Eye Care, Cont'd from pg. 17

Upon securing funding from USAID, the AECP launched our three-year outreach program for children in five regions of Armenia. We also helped regional healthcare providers, including school nurses, by offering training opportunities to develop knowledge and skills on pediatric eye screening techniques, basic pediatric vision disorders, low vision and eye disease treatment methods and more.

Additionally, our program benefits parents and the general public by enhancing their knowledge and awareness on the importance of eye care through training opportunities, distribution of educational materials and activity books and board games for children. Among other topics, training covers important issues like the stigma against eyeglasses and helps parents and school staff address problems that children with glasses are more likely to experience like bullying, low self-esteem and the dangers of living with blurry vision if they don't wear their glasses.

Since this program began in July 2021, more than 3,000 schoolchildren have been screened. As well, work is underway to develop the screening schedule and identify the communities where screenings will be conducted in four other provinces of Armenia: Tavush, Vayots Dzor, Shirak and Syunik.

Due to the high interest of regional healthcare authorities and medical staff towards this program, the number of participants and beneficiaries will exceed the project's initial goals. As a response, our organization has found new creative ways to conduct training sessions, including remote options, telehealth, consultations and in-person referrals, to maximize the benefits for all. "This program is a significant step forward in preventing blindness among Armenia's children and improving children's educational, development and chance of success in the future," AECP Country Director Nune Yeghiazaryan said.

As part of the program, the AECP is also working to develop a software to enter its eye screening data into the cloud-based database and connect it with the national database with the goal to digitize and modernize the healthcare system in Armenia.

The program is expected to continue through May 2023 and offer services in the AECP's five Regional Eye Centers, which will contribute directly to the sustainability of the project through transfer of knowledge and the building of expertise. Mr. and Mrs. Michael J. Aghajanian Mr. and Mrs. Veruir Aghamalian Ms. Cynthia G. Aghamianz Mr. and Mrs. Aris Aghazarian Dr. and Mrs. Vicken Aghjayan Mr. and Mrs. Harold C. Aghjian Mr. Samuel J. Agigian Mr. Ed Aharonian Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Ajemian Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Akellian Ms. Laura H. Akgulian Ms. Mary Akgulian Ms. Margaret S. Akian Mr. and Mrs. Zaven P. Akian Ms. Karen Alajajian Mr. and Mrs. Michael Alekian Ms. Adrienne G. Alexanian Dr. and Mrs. Moorad K. Alexanian Mrs. Zepure Z. Aliksanian Mr. and Mrs. Edward M. Altounian Hon. Michael R. Amerian Mr. Robert Amirkhanian Dr. and Mrs. George A. Ampagoomian Mr. and Mrs. Artin Ananighian Mr. Harry Anjoorian Mr. and Mrs. Vartkes Apelian Dr. and Mrs. John Apisson Ms. Alice Apkarian Mr. Adam Arakelian Mr. Jora Arakenian Mr. and Mrs. Ara Araz Mr. Michael M. Arian Mr. and Mrs. Van M. Aroian Mr. Armen R. Aroyan Ms. Deana Arsenian Dr. Silva A. Arslanian Ms. Susan C. Arslanian Dr. Raffi S. Arzoomanian Mr. Khatchig L. Asdourian Mr. Richard Aslanian Mrs. Lori S. Asquith Ms. Anita R. Assarian Dr. and Mrs. Gary S. Assarian Ms. Maral S. Atashian Mr. John M. Atmajian Mr. Antranig Avakian Mr. and Mrs. Aris Avakian Mr. Barkef Avakian Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. Avakian Mr. Stephen Avakian Mr. Terry G. Avakian Mr. Jason Avant Ms. Colleen Avedikian Mr. and Mrs. Edward Avedisian

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### Improving Regional Eye Care, Cont'd from pg. 9

that will solve the issue of accessibility and affordability of eye care for the population of these regions and surrounding areas. As well, it will contribute to the ongoing process of decentralization care by building the capacity of regional doctors. Overall the impact from this initiative will directly contribute to the elimination of preventable blindness in Armenia, which is the number one priority of the AECP.

Our five Eye Examination Clinics will be fully equipped with advanced medical equipment that will allow physicians to perform a more detailed diagnosis and find appropriate treatment solutions. They will provide residents with access to the most up-to-date ophthalmic tools and skilled specialists while also providing a training hub for local physicians and staff.

The AECP places high value on ensuring sustainability of any project it undertakes. As such our AECP ophthalmologists will train the local health providers including ophthalmologists, ophthalmological nurses and support personnel in the most current eye care techniques to provide comprehensive eye exams, treatments and referrals. This training will enhance the skills and knowledge of regional physicians through on-the-job training and empower local healthcare providers to regularly conduct eye screenings among its population.

Ultimately the establishment of these Eye Exam Clinics will be used to conduct comprehensive eye examinations and offer treatment solutions; train local ophthalmologists and ensure the transfer of international best practices and knowledge throughout Armenia; and contribute directly to the development of primary healthcare being provided in the regions of Armenia.

With the large undertaking of organizing a more comprehensive eye care delivery system that spans across all regions of Armenia we are in need of sponsorships to develop these supplemental eye care facilities throughout the country. All sponsorships come with naming opportunities, with either exam clinics or polyclinics being named after a person or entity of your choice.

We are thrilled to report that our first Eye Examination Clinic has been sponsored by the Jirair S. and Elizabeth Hovnanian Family Foundation! Sponsorship levels range from \$30,000-\$175,000. If you are interested in underwriting an eye care facility, please contact us at:

> 949-933-4069 info@eyecareproject.com

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