

WHO SPECS 2030: a global initiative to strengthen refractive error services

BY STUART KEEL



Figure 1: Homa Bay County, Kenya – March, 2018: Stanley (centre) with other kids playing in the backyard of Ober Boy's Primary School. He is a visually impaired pupil and the governor of class 7. © WHO / NOOR / Sebastian Liste.



Figure 2: Lima – March, 2018: Samir trying his new glasses with a doctor who visited his school. © WHO / NOOR / Sebastian Liste.



Figure 3: Lima – March, 2018: Desiree, 10, in her class the day that the Health workers came to their school for a visual examinations in Villa María del Triunfo neighborhood in Lima. © WHO / NOOR / Sebastian Liste.

Globally, it is estimated that only around one-third of people with vision impairment due to refractive error have received access to a quality pair of spectacles [1]. In recognition that uncorrected refractive error is the leading cause of vision impairment amongst children and adults, and that spectacles are a very cost-effective intervention, the first ever global target for refractive error was endorsed at the World Health Assembly in 2021. Specifically, the global target is to increase the percentage of people with access to appropriate refractive error services (known as effective coverage of refractive error, or eREC) by 40 percentage points by 2030 [2]. This means that, if the global coverage was 30% in 2020, the aim would be to achieve 70% coverage in 2030.

Despite the availability of a simple, sight-correcting intervention, there are notable challenges to increasing the accessibility and affordability of spectacles, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Expanding the global refractive error coverage will require a comprehensive approach that is well coordinated amongst all relevant stakeholders.

In order to support countries to achieve the World Health Assembly endorsed 2030 target on refractive error, the World Health Organization (WHO) recently launched the SPECS 2030 Initiative. This initiative calls for coordinated action amongst all stakeholders (public, private, non-profit, and philanthropy) across the following five pillars, in line with the letters of SPECS:

- S:** Improve access to refractive **S**ervices
- P:** Build capacity of **P**ersonnel to provide refractive services
- E:** Improve population **E**ducation
- C:** Reduce the **C**ost of refractive error services
- S:** Strengthen **S**urveillance and research.

The WHO SPECS 2030 Initiative will focus on four key strategies of engagement with the intention to directly support countries and other stakeholders with strengthening the provision of refractive error services:

1. Developing technical guidance and tools to facilitate health planners in strengthening refractive error services within health systems.

2. Establishing the WHO Global SPECS Network to bring together stakeholders across all relevant sectors to promote united action and coordinated advocacy.
3. Engaging with the private sector to encourage meaningful contributions for sustainably scaling up the coverage of refractive error services, specifically targeting low- and intermediate-resource settings.
4. Engaging with regions and countries through WHO-led policy dialogues with governments, country-level workshops and training for health planners and healthcare providers, or capacity building and awareness raising activities.

Find more information in the WHO SPECS 2030 webpage.

 www.who.int/initiatives/specs-2030

References

1. World Health Organization. *Report of the 2030 targets on effective coverage of eye care*. Geneva, Switzerland; World Health Organization; 2022.
2. Integrated people-centred eye care, including preventable vision impairment and blindness (2021). *Resolution WHA74(12)*. [https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA74/A74\(12\)-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA74/A74(12)-en.pdf) [Link last accessed April 2024].
3. World Health Organization. *World report on vision*. Geneva, Switzerland; World Health Organization; 2019.
4. World Health Organization. *Package of eye care interventions*. Geneva, Switzerland; World Health Organization; 2022.

AUTHOR



Stuart Keel,

Technical Officer: Sensory Functions, Disability and Rehabilitation Unit, World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland.