

INNOVATION & VISION HEALTH TREATMENT

From a gene therapy for blindness to an infused biologic for a rare autoimmune condition, innovative therapies inspire hope and offer unprecedented relief to Americans affected by vision impairments. By restoring vision or reducing symptoms, new treatment approaches can enhance patients' self-sufficiency and improve their day-to-day lives. But too often these patients continue to struggle.

Access barriers may limit treatment options and prevent patients from benefiting from the very therapies designed to help them.

To alleviate the significant burden of vision conditions, policies must allow for patients to access the innovative treatments that are available. That includes acknowledging the value of advanced therapies, encouraging comprehensive health plan coverage and advancing research so that development of breakthrough treatments continues.



Q: HOW HAS MEDICAL INNOVATION CHANGED VISION CARE?

Over the last 50 years vision treatment has refined its focus from symptom management to treating underlying disease processes. Advances in technology have allowed researchers to study the eye in once unimaginable detail, increasing their understanding of vision conditions. Innovators then used this information to design therapies that target the precise source of vision problems.

Continued innovation has expanded treatment options, both in number and type. Today patients can find relief with innovative therapies such as injections, lasers, infusions, biologics, gene therapy and assistive devices. More treatment options create the opportunity for personalized care to better meet each patient's specific needs.



Q: WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIVE VISION THERAPIES?

Recent medical breakthroughs have revolutionized care for certain vision conditions. Targeted, comprehensive care is supported by innovative therapies like those listed below.

GENE THERAPY FOR BLINDNESS

The growing field of precision medicine takes individual factors like genetics and environment into treatment consideration. This approach inspired an innovative gene therapy to combat blindness.¹

Using a detailed understanding of DNA, a healthy gene is injected into the eye to correct a genetic mutation that causes progressive vision loss. The injection is the first FDA-approved directly administered gene therapy.

BIOLOGIC MEDICATION FOR THYROID EYE DISEASE

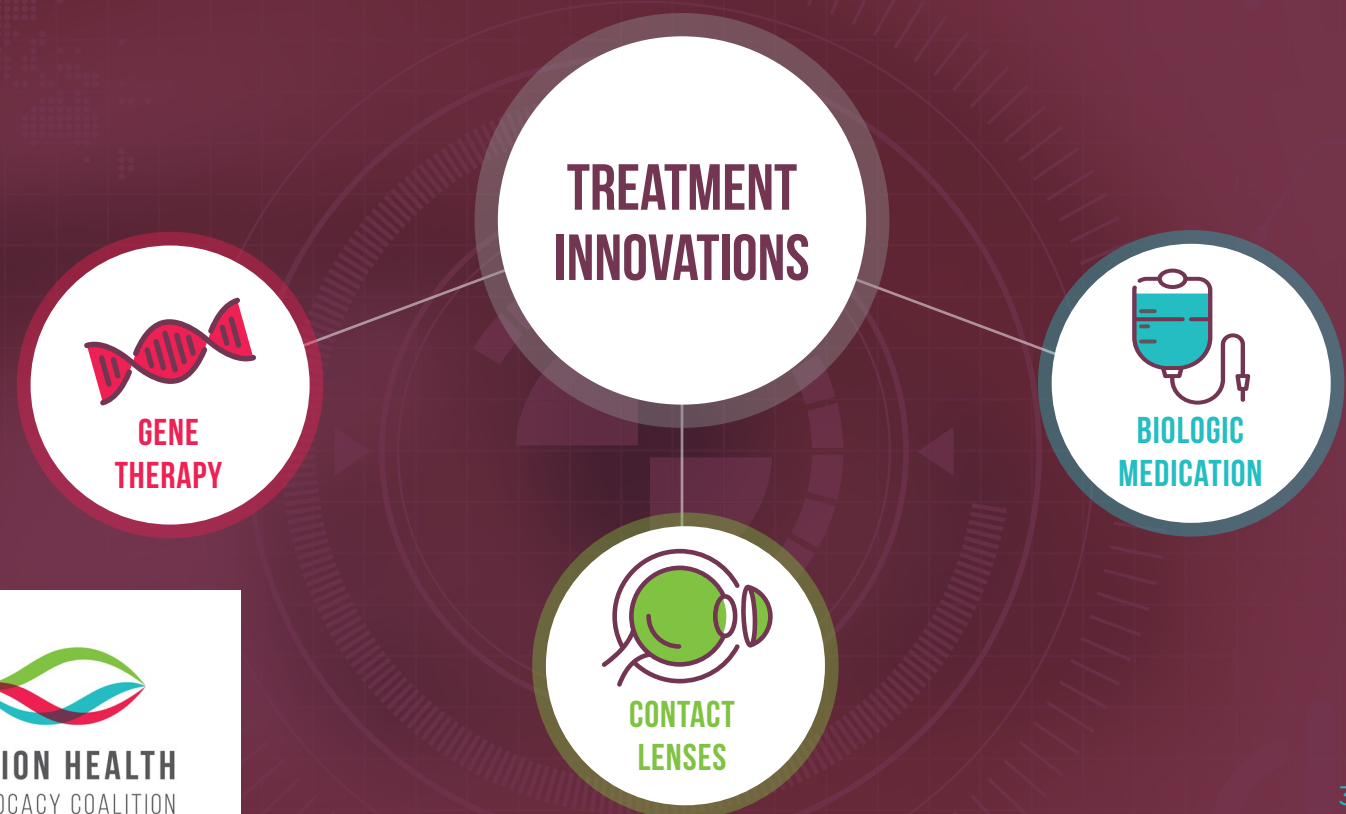
An innovative [biologic medication](#) offers patients with [thyroid eye disease](#) hope for the first time.²

Thyroid eye disease is a rare but debilitating autoimmune condition.

Previously, clinicians could do little more than help patients manage symptoms with repeated surgery and steroids. The new disease-slowing therapy can help patients reduce incapacitating symptoms while also avoiding the need for invasive surgery.

REDESIGNED CONTACT LENSES FOR MYOPIA

Researchers are constantly looking for ways to reinvent existing therapies for new uses. This is the case for a [landmark contact lens](#) that not only corrects childhood myopia but also prevents it from worsening.³ Myopia is a type of refractive error that causes nearsightedness. The innovative lens trains the developing eye by focusing incoming light.



Q: BESIDES ADVANCED THERAPIES, HOW CAN INNOVATION IMPROVE VISION HEALTH?

New diagnostic and treatment approaches are reinventing how patients access vision care.

For example, advances in [technology](#) present new virtual opportunities.⁴ [Studies](#) have demonstrated the ability to screen for and diagnose certain conditions using telemedicine, opening up greater potential for remote care.¹ Development of

smartphone applications to test visual acuity could help identify impairments and link patients with needed resources such as contacts and glasses. A virtual exam also reduces deterrents like lengthy appointment times and transportation posed by in-person appointments.

Q: HOW IS THE VALUE OF INNOVATIVE VISION THERAPIES DETERMINED?

With innovation in vision treatment comes complex discussions of value. One factor is the years of trying and failing that researchers may undergo to develop an advanced medication. Experts estimate that it [costs](#) nearly \$1 billion in research and development before a new drug is approved and available to patients. In turn, the medications can carry a high price tag.

Conversations about value must also incorporate the importance of advanced treatments to patients. By improving patients' ability to work, live independently, and interact with family and community, treatments can deliver deeply meaningful quality-of-life improvements.

Though not always easily quantified, these improvements rival the value of health outcomes for many patients.

Health technology assessments, however, may not accurately integrate quality-of-life considerations into their economic analysis of new drugs. Organizations like the Boston-based Institute for Clinical and Economic Review, for example, examine drugs' cost-effectiveness without fully quantifying their value to patients.

Health economists' conclusions can then embolden insurance companies to make it difficult for patients to access new treatments. Health plans may point to drug value assessments to rationalize coverage barriers or justify not including certain medications on their list of approved drugs.

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Q: WHAT ACCESS BARRIERS STAND BETWEEN PATIENTS AND INNOVATIVE VISION TREATMENTS?

Innovative vision treatments aren't always readily available to patients. A number of barriers may stand in their way.

Limited access to vision and eye care professionals, for example, can undermine care for patients, making it difficult to consult a specialist or obtain the care they need. Patients may not have a specialist in their area. In some cases, health plans may require high co-pays for specialist visits or have narrow provider networks that limit patients' choice of providers.⁶

Even when patients can access a specialist, health plans may attempt to reduce short-term costs by slowing or blocking patients' access to innovative vision treatments.

STEP THERAPY

Insurers may impose step therapy, for example. Step therapy requires patients to fail a treatment that's preferred by their insurer before getting coverage for the treatment their physician prescribed.

PRIOR AUTHORIZATION

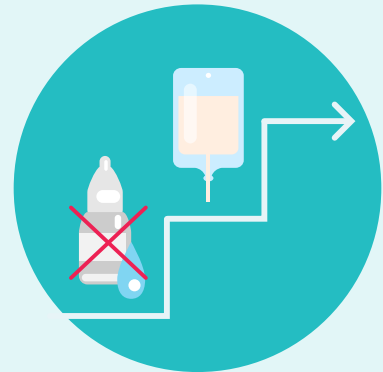
Patients may also face prior authorization, which limits access to innovative treatments by requiring a provider to justify why a patient needs a prescribed therapy. Even when the insurer grants authorization, treatment costs may be shifted onto patients, creating financial barriers.

SPECIALTY TIERS & HIGH CO-PAYS

Innovative medicines are often placed on the highest tier of insurers' prescription drug formularies. This can require patients to pay co-insurance, a portion of the medication's cost, rather than a flat co-pay. The expense can be prohibitive, blocking patients from potentially life-changing treatment.

ACCESS BARRIERS

TO INNOVATIVE VISION TREATMENTS



STEP THERAPY



PRIOR AUTHORIZATION



HIGH CO-PAY





CONCLUSION

As innovative vision therapies offer new treatment opportunities for patients with vision conditions, the need for continued progress remains strong. Recent medical advances provide a brighter future for many patients. But coverage barriers and incomplete notions of value can undermine access. **Policy change to address these barriers can encourage patient-centered vision care that allows patients to benefit from ongoing innovation.**

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VISION HEALTH
ADVOCACY COALITION

The Vision Health Advocacy Coalition promotes patient-centered policies that make services, devices and life-changing treatment accessible for people with vision conditions.

VisionHealthAdvocacy.org