



GEORGIA LIONS
Lighthouse
Foundation

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2024 Vision Report Card

Who We Are

Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation, Inc. is committed to maximizing the quality of life for Georgians by setting the standard for vision services and equal access to vision care for all Georgians. We do this by filling the gaps for uninsured and underinsured Georgians by providing access to low-cost vision services.

SUMMARY

The 2024 Vision Report Card describes the lack of affordable and accessible vision services in Georgia, the effect and impact on Georgia's children, adults, families, communities, and quality of life. It is unacceptable that any Georgian is unable to access vision care. Yet today in Georgia:

- 1.4 million Georgians do not have health insurance, and Georgia's uninsured rate of 13.7 percent is third highest in the country. In rural Georgia, the uninsured rate could climb to more than 25 percent by 2026.
- Research by Emory Eye Center identified 52 counties in Georgia where there are few, if any, vision care providers. This equates to 30% of Georgia counties essentially vision deserts, which lack eye care services.
- 408,000 low-income Georgians do not qualify for Medicaid in Georgia and make too little to get financial help to buy private insurance at [healthcare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov). These Georgians have incomes below the poverty line (less than \$15,060 a year for an individual or \$25,820 a year for a family of three) and fall into the coverage gap with no affordable health insurance options.
- As a result of our societal response to remote learning during the pandemic, vision specialists are seeing a change in the shape of the eyes of our youth. We are seeing an increase from the average of 20% to upwards of 50% of students screened needing further care.
- More than 300,000 children have been dropped from Medicaid and Peach Care for kids since the pandemic ended. A report from the [Georgetown University Center for Children and Families](#) pinpoints a nationwide trend: More than 4 million kids were left uninsured, soon after the COVID public-health emergency ended. Georgia ranks third-highest for the number of children who have lost coverage.

The Current State Vision Services in Georgia

Georgia's vision deserts hinder economic mobility and perpetuate generational wealth gaps. Affordability impacts accessibility, and the cost of vision services continues to rise while the number of optometrists and ophthalmologists in Georgia has not kept up with the population growth. Vision impairment combined with inaccessible vision services, can cause loss of jobs, poor academic achievement, behavioral issues, and social isolation.

- Affordability isn't the only social determinant of access. Often, families can't obtain vision services because of distance to a vision specialist, a lack of transportation, and issues for poverty level Georgians unable to take time off from work to get care.
- While families face rising costs and unreliable access, the number of vision service providers is inadequate for our state. Georgia ranks as one of the worst states in the United States for availability of vision care providers.
- To give children, adults, and seniors the best chance to thrive and quality of life, significant improvements in screening and access to vision care, for those unable to pass the screenings, must take place.

Recommendations to Improve Vision in Georgia

The need for a vision screening system that works for families and providers is urgent. Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation, Inc. recommends that Georgia policymakers take action:

State of Georgia pre-schools and K-12 should require/provide vision screenings for Georgia's children.

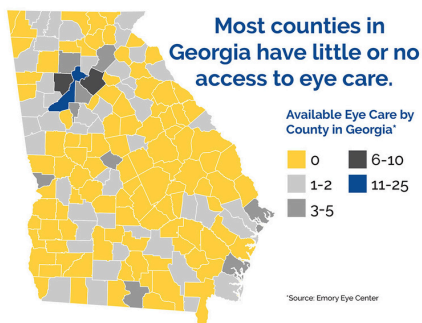
State and local boards of education should maximize funding and partnerships by strengthening requirements for the inclusion of vision screenings annually for public prekindergarten, Head Start, and K- 12 public, private, and charter schools as well as home-schooled children.

Once children are screened and determined to need further care, access to quality vision care services is essential.

Access to funding for organizations such as Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation, Inc. and other partners is essential. An opportunity to partner with a school of optometry in a nearby state with Georgia state funding for a first year resident to work with us on a mobile basis would be ideal to help address the needs of Georgia's students.

Access for rural Georgians, middle school age and above, to vision care is essential. State funding to assist in providing tele-optometry clinics and particularly legislation allowing non-profit tele-optometry clinics to be provided in rural areas other than Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), Public Health Nursing Agencies and other licensed care provider offices, should be made available.

Rural Georgians residing in vision deserts, with little or no access to vision care providers, can and have benefitted from our state-wide tele-optometry program. Through high-tech equipment, Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation, Inc. provides the opportunity for patients who otherwise would not be able to get care by bringing a remote doctor and optician to the patients. When we provide the traditional mobile clinics, we can serve patients in locations convenient to them such as shelters and schools. There is no difference in providing quality vision care between having a licensed provider on-site in our traditional clinics and having a licensed provider working remotely with our patients through our tele-optometry program.



Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation, Inc. delivery of vision services at-a-glance

