

## 2025 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 2025 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% is third highest in the country. In rural Georgia, the uninsured rate could climb to more than 25% 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. 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.
- During the pandemic, children not only fell behind in their educational levels, but schools also relied on remote learning through laptops and other devices. The use of devices, without periodic long distance vision experience, drastically affected the shape of their eyes causing myopia. Schools continue to use these devices for teaching methods and periodically use remote learning. We are seeing an increase from the national average of 20% prior to the pandemic to upwards of 50% in screenings, with a national average increased to 30%, 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 of 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 an improved 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

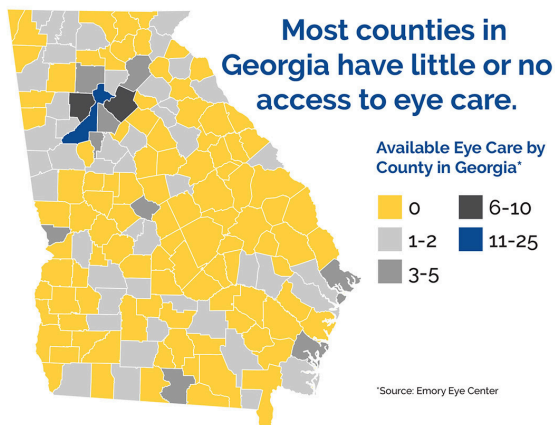
The need for a vision screening system that works for families and providers is urgent. Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation, Inc. recommends that the State of Georgia pre-K and elementary schools should require/provide vision “annual” screenings for Georgia’s children.

This should not occur only when a child enters the school system but should also occur annually, especially in light of the changes in children’s eyesight since the pandemic and the increase use of devices in the classroom with periodic remote learning requiring device usage as well.

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 (there are 24 schools in the U.S.), we request \$350,000 from the state’s budget to assist us in employing two optometry fellows. They will work with us to provide critical vision services to Georgia’s students.

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.

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.



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



## 2024 - 2025 School Year Impact | Mobile School Clinics

In school year 2025, are on track to complete 5,000 screenings and to serve approximately 30% of these children through eye exams and glasses.

### 2022-2023 School Year Impact | Mobile School Clinics

**1,011** Vision Screenings 

**259** Students Referred for Add'l Services\*

\*Additional Services Refers to On-Site Comprehensive Examinations, Glasses Fittings, Outsourced Surgery Services (Ophthalmologists)

**11**  
Schools

✓ FREE Vision Screening  
FREE Examination  
FREE Glasses (1st Pair)

**26%**

Students with  
vision  
impairment

### 2023 YMCA Summer Camp Impact | Mobile School Clinics

**713** Vision Screenings 

**118** Campers Referred for Add'l Services\*

\*Additional Services Refers to On-Site Comprehensive Examinations, Glasses Fittings, Outsourced Surgery Services (Ophthalmologists)

**8**  
YMCAs

✓ FREE Vision Screening  
FREE Examination  
FREE Glasses (1st Pair)

**17%**

Campers  
with vision  
impairment

### 2023-2024 School Year Impact | Mobile School Clinics

**2,282** Vision Screenings 

**846** Students Referred for Add'l Services\*

\*Additional Services Refers to On-Site Comprehensive Examinations, Glasses Fittings, Outsourced Surgery Services (Ophthalmologists). Several received for eye patches for corrective issues.

**22**  
Schools

✓ FREE Vision Screening  
FREE Examination  
FREE Glasses (1st Pair)

**37%**

Students with  
vision  
impairment

**90%**

Referred  
received  
glasses

### 8.24-12.24 School Year Impact | Mobile School Clinics

**3,921** Vision Screenings 

**1,399** Students Referred for Add'l Services\*

\*Additional Services Refers to On-Site Comprehensive Examinations, Glasses Fittings, Outsourced Surgery Services (Ophthalmologists). Several received for eye patches for corrective issues.

**20**  
Schools

✓ FREE Vision Screening  
FREE Examination  
FREE Glasses (1st Pair)

**36%**

Students with  
vision  
impairment