



We Changed the Law to Let Home-Bound Seniors Get Eye Care

By Mark T. Morodomi, President, California State Board of Optometry

Crazy laws abound in America.

Pennsylvania?

The state's legal statutes prohibit the sale of love potions.

California?

Doctors of Optometry can't make regular house calls.

Think of a disabled grandmother in her late 80s. She spends most of her day watching TV or reading the newspaper. But even these small pleasures are disappearing. Her spectacles prescription is years—if not decades—out of date.

Her vision makes her more likely to lose her balance and fall.

Caretakers can't lift her wheelchair downstairs.

Car travel quickly makes her nauseous.

Her quality of life is deteriorating.

But she can't get a new prescription unless she visits the office of an optometrist or ophthalmologist.

Fortunately, on January 1, 2020—the Golden State will remove that crazy barrier.

Both the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institutes of Health confirm the importance of eye health and the role of vision impairment as a serious health concern in older adults. Vision loss can impact the overall health and wellbeing of seniors, increasing depression, causing difficulty in correctly identifying medication, and contributing to falls. Quality, comprehensive vision care could help ease their suffering and preclude their entry to a nursing home or hospital.

In our role of regulating optometrists, the California State Board of Optometry heard that doctors were forced to ignore the pleas of older patients for house calls. The Board convinced the state Legislature to get rid of that absurd rule. We're thankful to Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian for his authorship of Assembly Bill 458, to Assemblymember Rob Bonta for his support and to Governor Gavin Newsom for his signing of the bill. In the near future, the Board will implement a permitting system so that optometrists can provide house calls to disabled patients. This is a new tool for continued service to patients and an innovative practice-building opportunity for partnership with providers of eldercare services. Plus it finally puts California on par with Pennsylvania, where it's already legal for optometrists to make house calls.

Mark T. Morodomi is the president of the California State Board of Optometry, which is the state agency that licenses optometrists and opticians. He is not an optometrist. He had a home-bound aunt who turned 100 last December.

