

Vision Care on the Move

Mobile Eyecare Meets Patients Where They Are



Image Credit: Getty Images/ Anastasia Usenko

BY GWENDOLYN PLUMMER / FEATURES EDITOR

NEW YORK—There are countless roles in the optical industry—dozens of different job titles, daily workflows, expectations and callings—but we all have one common goal: to get eyecare to everyone who needs it, in one way or another. In large part, achieving that goal comes down to removing barriers to eyecare access—and one crucial way to remove those barriers is to physically bring eyecare to those who need it, to meet patients where they are.

For many, seeking eyecare is difficult or, in some cases, completely impossible. Employing various means of mobile eyecare allows the optical industry to bring care where it's needed—whether that's next door, in disaster relief areas halfway around the world, or on a fully equipped airplane hospital. This really is what mobile eyecare boils down to: bringing care to patients, removing barriers and achieving health equity.

Mobile eyecare is as impactful as it is varied. Here, *Vision Monday* catches up with a number of

mobile eyecare organizations that operate both here in the U.S. and internationally, to explore the landscape of mobile eyecare today, offering a peek at what its future could look like.

RestoringVision's Advocacy Efforts

Dedicated to creating equitable access to eyecare and eyeglasses for people living on less than \$2 a day, RestoringVision has reached 24 million people in need since 2003. The nonprofit's advocacy efforts are aimed primarily at the 90 percent of people with uncorrected vision loss who live in low- and middle-income countries, with limited access to vision services. At the cornerstone of the RestoringVision program is breaking down barriers to eyecare and, on a large scale, solving the global vision crisis. So far, the organization said, it has restored vision for 28 million people and impacted 147 countries. This work is done in collaboration with over 2,700 NGO and government agency partners, as well as optical companies from around the world.

“At RestoringVision, we believe in the power of collective action to create positive change,” Pelin Munis, PhD, CEO of RestoringVision, said in a recent statement. “Together with our partners, donors, and supporters, we can work toward a world where everyone, regardless of their circumstances, has access to the vision care they need to thrive.”

In the United States, RestoringVision partners with both Americares and National Vision through the National Vision Cares program. The goal in the U.S., National Vision reports, is to help 500,000 Americans see better by providing readers to ultra-low-income Americans. In addition, the organizations work alongside one another throughout the year to meet vision needs in local communities nationwide.

Also among RestoringVision's valued relationships is its partnership with Walking Shield, a group it works with to provide essential vision care to the community. Founded in 1986, Walking Shield <https://walkingshield.org/> is a nonprofit organization that works to improve the quality of

RestoringVision Brings Eyecare Everywhere

life for American Indian families. This is accomplished in partnership with foundations, tribal governments, urban Indian service organizations, and government agencies, by coordinating programs to provide shelter, educational assistance, and health and vision care, among other offerings, to American Indian communities in need in the U.S.

RestoringVision's impact is broken down into two programs: the Global Access Program and the Community Outreach Program. The Global Access Program is RestoringVision's largest program, reaching over 3 million people a year. In collaboration with global health and humanitarian NGOs and local governments in low- and middle-income countries, Restoring Vision provides eyecare through pop-up vision camps, mobile clinics and by embedding programs into existing health care infrastructure. According to the organization, the



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2024 aim for the Global Access Program is to impact 4.745 million people and reach 18 countries.

The Community Outreach Program works in partnership with small and medium sized non-

profit organizations that are primarily based in the United States and conduct outreach and medical mission trips to less developed countries. RestoringVision said these projects serve smaller communities and reach people in more remote and rural areas. In 2024, the goal for the Community Outreach Program is to impact 750,000 people and reach 100 countries.

Moving into the future, RestoringVision aims to continue to expand its impact and reach more people who need care. By 2026, the organization said in its 2024-26 Strategic Plan, it aims to reach at least 10 million people annually. RestoringVision will continue to serve people living in poverty in the United States, alongside reaching countries in need in Africa and parts of Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Europe.

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20/20 Onsite

20/20 Onsite <https://www.2020onsite.com/> launched in 2014 with the goal of making eyecare more convenient—and thus more accessible. In fact, the company was born from the personal experience of Howard Bornstein, who founded 20/20 Onsite after he “realized that the inconvenience of getting an eye exam prevented many people from receiving the care they needed,” Sonali Bloom, CEO of 20/20 Onsite, told *Vision Monday*. The company’s first Mobile Vision Clinic (MVC) launched in Boston in 2014 to deliver eye exams to patients at work, school or in their local communities. Some 10 years later, this work is still central to 20/20 Onsite’s mission.

20/20 Onsite’s MVCs are fully equipped with advanced ophthalmic testing equipment, Bloom said. They are staffed by qualified optometrists and ophthalmic technicians who are trained to handle comprehensive eye exams and screenings. By bringing these services to the patient, 20/20 Onsite is able to eliminate geographical barriers to care. The MVCs, which operate across the United States, have served more than 100,000 patients across various programs, including corporate wellness initiatives and public health outreach.

In addition, the company uses its technology to support clinical trials across the country—an expansion that was born in 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions made these clinical trials more complicated. Bloom explained, “Our Mobile Vision Clinics pivoted to support trial sponsors, investigators, and patients by providing a safe, flexible way to conduct essential eye assessments, right outside patients’ homes. This allowed clinical trials to continue despite restrictions on travel and in-person visits, ensuring critical studies could progress without compromising patient safety.” Bloom said that to date, the MVCs have supported 18 clinical trials in 48 states.



20/20 Onsite’s mobile eyecare clinics have provided care to more than 100,000 patients across 48 states, and supported 18 clinical trials.

In its 10 years of service, 20/20 Onsite has expanded to support more than 450 companies, including many schools and public health events, all with the aim of bringing eyecare directly to

the patient. Bloom said, “We have a long-running school-based eyecare program in the Boston Public Schools, through which we have provided thousands of comprehensive eye exams and free

glasses for students who have eye health issues or vision correction needs. We have also supported the American Diabetes Association and Dia De La Mujer Latina by offering free diabetic eye screenings at public health events like the Step Out: Walk to Stop Diabetes. These efforts are part of our broader mission to address health equity and serve underserved populations... Our ability to reduce patient burden greatly reduces patient dropout and is paramount to trial success. On average, we reduce participant travel from 67 miles to only 12 miles.”

Moving forward, Bloom aims to continue expanding 20/20 Onsite’s role in decentralized

clinical trials, as well as increasing the scope of 20/20 Onsite’s work in clinical trials Phase 1 to 3 and post-marketing safety surveillance programs nationwide. The company is also focused on growing its EyeRecruit Pre-Screening Programs, which helps reduce enrollment timelines and ensures trials hit their targets faster. Bloom said, “Our vision is to broaden our reach, ensuring that no patient is excluded from essential vision care due to geography, cost or other barriers. These programs are just the beginning as we strive to revolutionize point-of-need clinical eye assessments and eye health equity.”

Orbis Flying Eye Hospital

Orbis International <https://www.orbis.org/en> operates the world’s first and only Flying Eye Hospital, a fully accredited ophthalmic teaching hospital on-board an aircraft, equipped with an operating room, classroom, recovery room and a high-tech simulation training center. Run by a staff of clinicians, administrators and mechanical experts from about a dozen different countries worldwide, the Flying Eye Hospital has visited more than 95 countries since it took its first flight in 1982.

Flying Eye Hospital projects take place in low- and middle-income countries, according to Hunter

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Bringing The Eye Hospital to the Patient

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Cherwek, MD, vice president of clinical services and technologies, Orbis International. In those areas, Dr. Cherwek said, “Orbis International staff and volunteer faculty (medical experts) share their knowledge with eyecare professionals who urgently need it, while also providing treatment for local patients.”

The Flying Eye Hospital came to be through “a unique and lasting alliance between innovation and medicine,” explained Dr. Cherwek. “Orbis’s founders observed a severe lack of eyecare in low- and middle-income countries, where avoidable blindness was widespread. The high costs of tuition and international travel prevented most eyecare professionals in those areas from getting quality training.

“Orbis founders believed that bringing training where it was needed most would allow local eyecare teams to build the skills they needed to provide quality vision care in their communities for generations to come. Thus, the idea of outfitting an aircraft with an ophthalmic teaching hospital was born and, with it, Orbis and our Flying Eye Hospital,” he said.

The Flying Eye Hospital took its first flight in 1982 to Panama. Throughout its history, the Flying Eye Hospital has kept atop of technological innovations to ensure patients and ECPs receive the best care and education possible. In fact, Orbis’ telemedicine and e-learning platform, Cybersight, launched in the earliest days of the internet, is today accessed via almost every country and territory in the world and recently surpassed 100,000 registered users, said Dr. Cherwek. He said, “Everything Orbis does is geared toward our mission: building strong and sustainable eyecare systems globally.”

Most recently, the Flying Eye Hospital completed its ninth project in Mongolia, where more than 250 ECPs received training and more than 50 patients received sight-saving surgery. In par-



The Orbis Flying Eye Hospital is a fully accredited ophthalmic teaching hospital on-board an aircraft. Photo courtesy of Geoff Oliver Bugbee/Orbis International.

ticular, Dr. Cherwek recalled the story of Nandin-Egshiglen, a four-old-girl from Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia. Dr. Cherwek said, “Nandin-Egshiglen is one example of a patient whose life was deeply impacted by this project.” Her parents brought her for eyecare and learned she had mature bilateral cataracts that would need to be removed as soon as possible to avoid lifelong vision problems. The cataracts were so mature that she lost interest in playing with friends and loved ones, and even stopped attending preschool.

Dr. Cherwek continued, “During the project, Dr. Divya Natarajan, a first-time Orbis Flying Eye Hospital volunteer faculty cataract specialist, recognized Nandin-Egshiglen as a good teaching case for the local ophthalmologists and slotted her for surgery.” Her cataract surgery on-board the Flying Eye Hospital was successful.

Dr. Cherwek said, “Nandin-Egshiglen is a great example of a successful outcome from the recent Flying Eye Hospital project in Mongolia. But, its important to remember that the lasting, sustainable impact from the project comes in the form



Nandin-Egshiglen, a four-old-girl from Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, received cataract surgery on-board the Orbis Flying Eye Hospital. Photo courtesy of Geoff Oliver Bugbee/Orbis International.

of training. The local eye health professionals who received training are now confident in their abilities to perform surgeries with newly learned skills. They can continue to care for patients in their own communities and help to teach the next generation of Mongolian eyecare professionals.”

The OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation

The OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation's mobile clinic model and manufacturing capabilities allow those in need of glasses to access newly prescribed, quality eyewear on-site, enabling the Foundation to bring care wherever it is needed most and removing the transportation barrier for patients. Staffed by program managers alongside doctors and volunteers from across EssilorLuxottica, the mobile vision clinic vehicles and on-location pods provide care across North America approximately every other day of the year, EssilorLuxottica told *VM*. The Foundation also has a global team providing mobile vehicle services in other regions around the world.

In North America specifically, EssilorLuxottica said the Foundation operates four mobile vision clinics, each with on-site in-office edging equipment, allowing the team to manufacture most single vision and spherical bifocal prescriptions on-site. The fleet also includes a manufacturing vehicle, which operates four edgers and supports with transportation of pod equipment. Each vehicle has the capacity to serve up to 75 patients a day; vehicles visit schools and nonprofits, as well as other community organizations, to provide comprehensive eyecare at no cost.

In 2024 alone, OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation has served 3,870 patients—an average of 53

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Each of the Foundation's mobile clinics has on-site edging equipment, allowing the team to manufacture prescriptions in the clinic.



Making Eyecare More Accessible Nationwide

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patients each day. In addition to clinics executed through the mobile vision vehicles, the Foundation supports a number of nonprofit organizations that operate similar mobile vision clinic services. With its Changing Life Through Lenses charitable glasses program, the Foundation provides these partners with frames and lenses at no cost to use in their own charitable efforts, the company said.

Leveraging the scope of EssilorLuxottica, the Foundation has also conducted a series of mobile vision vehicle stops in partnership with LensCrafters and Sunglass Hut, serving patients in need in numerous cities across the United States, and giving associates at LensCrafters and Sunglass Hut the opportunity to give back to their own communities.

The need for mobile eyecare is critical, said Becky Palm, executive director, OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation North America, and removing barriers to access is one of the most effective ways to ensure everyone gets the care they need. She said, “We know that physical access to care is one of the key barriers to vision care for people in need. By creating a mobile clinic vehicle model, we’re able to remove that barrier and serve patients directly by meeting them where they are. Our unique mobile clinic vehicle model allows glasses to be manufactured on-site the same day that patients receive their exam, eliminating transportation issues and allowing patients to leave the clinic with a life-changing pair of glasses”

Alongside these mobile vision vehicle programs, the Foundation hosts large on-location clinics across North America, where equipment is brought in portable pods and care is provided alongside community partners in places like schools, community centers, juvenile detention centers and churches. These community organizations can then serve as liaisons to referral organizations that allow patients to find more permanent health care. The Foundation said, “Our various mobile clinic models allow our organization to provide tailored care that best addresses the specific needs of the



Staffed by program managers, doctors and volunteers from across EssilorLuxottica, the OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation’s mobile clinics bring care wherever it is needed.

population and location we’re serving. Our nimble mobile program models allow us to be agile and serve patients regardless of the barriers faced.”

Through all of OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation’s programs combined, more than 2.5 million pairs of glasses have been provided to people in need in North America, with more than 80 million provided globally.

ECN Purpose

Based in Orange County, Calif., ECN Purpose’s Mobile Eye Health Unit travels to specific locations throughout the county based on the needs of nonprofit partners in the community and where programs will best serve those in need. The Unit is equipped with state-of-the-art optometric equipment that allows volunteer optometrists and technicians to perform vision screenings and eye examinations, said Carolyn Khuu, program manager at ECN Purpose. “We meet people where they are and safely connect them to vision care,” she explained.

ECN Purpose’s Mobile Eye Health Program was founded in 2023 as an expansion of the larger ECN Purpose nonprofit, which began its work in 1976. In its first year of operation, the Mobile Eye Health Pro-

gram reached more than 800 people and provided over 260 eyecare services to those ranging from 5 to 58 years of age, Khuu said. As the program’s second year continues, the goal is to expand into including eyewear as well—ECN Purpose is currently raising funds for the proper equipment to make eyewear in-house, and seeking support from industry lens manufacturers.

Bringing eyecare to those who need it is an important extension of the work ECN Purpose has done for decades, and positively impacts the lives of those who receive care. Aspasia Shappett, founder and CEO of ECN Purpose, said, “Sight impacts everything, every day, everywhere.”

Khuu added, “Vision care is often overlooked, particularly in underserved communities. We understand how vision affects daily life and the ability to succeed, so we bring vision care to people who may not otherwise have services available to them. Our Mobile Eye Health Unit improves vision care accessibility by overcoming common barriers such as trust, transportation and geography. Our vision is to bridge the gap in eye health awareness and create connection to vision care for underserved individuals.”



ECN Purpose's Mobile Eye Health Unit is equipped with optometric equipment that allows volunteer optometrists and technicians to perform vision screenings and eye exams.



The Unit travels to specific locations throughout Orange County, Calif., based on need.



Mobile Eyecare Takes on Disaster Relief

VSP Vision Eyes of Hope

VSP Vision's Eyes of Hope mobile clinics travel the U.S. in partnership with local nonprofits and VSP network doctors to provide no-cost eye exams and prescription glasses for communities in need. The fleet is made up of three 40-foot-long mobile clinics, fully equipped with an eye exam room, an eyewear dispensary stocked with popular frame brands and a finishing lab to produce eyewear—for many patients, this eyewear can be ready within an hour of their exam. The fleet also includes a more nimble sprinter van, which can transport portable eye exam equipment for set-up at events.

VSP Eyes of Hope currently has four site leaders, who manage all event operations and partner coordination for these mobile clinics. In addition, VSP network doctors volunteer their time to provide the care, and VSP Vision employees from across the company sign up to work as Mobile Response Team members, or MRTs, who travel with the clinic for up to two weeks a year. Finally, each team is rounded out with a driver, who not only ensures that the clinic arrives safely but also helps make eyewear in the finishing lab.

The drive to create a mobile vision clinic became clear nearly 20 years ago in response to Hurricane Katrina, VSP Vision chief communications officer Pat McNeil told *VM*, when VSP Vision assisted communities along the Gulf Coast with replacing lost and damaged eyewear and helping doctors quickly return to providing care. McNeil said, "After seeing the need and appreciation from this community, VSP Vision decided to expand its charity care work so that more underrepresented and underserved communities across the country could receive the vision care they need to see their world clearly. From these hurricane recovery efforts, the Eyes of Hope mobile clinics launched as a complement to other existing efforts. To this day, VSP Eyes of Hope continues to evolve to address barriers of income,



VSP Vision's Eyes of Hope mobile clinics bring eyecare to those in need around the U.S. This includes schools, churches, community programs and disaster relief efforts.

distance and disaster to provide equitable access to eyecare and eyewear where it's needed most, across the country."

To date, VSP Eyes of Hope has helped more than 4 million people get access to no-cost eyewear and eyecare. In total, VSP Eyes of Hope has hosted more than 1,300 mobile clinic events nationwide, donated more than 2.5 million pairs of eyewear, invested \$21 million in relief to individuals and communities affected by disaster and partnered with thousands of local VSP Vision network doctors.

In fact, disaster relief remains a major component of Eyes of Hope's mobile clinic programs, the company said. VSP Eyes of Hope monitors natural disasters such as floods, tornadoes, hur-

ricanes and wildfires, and responds as soon as it is safe; in 2023, for example, VSP Eyes of Hope mobile clinics loaned portable equipment and donated eyewear to help the Hawaii Optometric Association provide 200+ people with care after wildfires. VSP Eyes of Hope also partners with the American Red Cross to help support relief efforts. To date, VSP Vision has invested more than \$21 million in disaster relief through Eyes of Hope and Corporate Giving.

VSP Eyes of Hope's mobile clinics also played a part in VSP Vision's partnership with Black EyeCare Perspective, which launched in 2022. As part of the 13 Percent Promise, which aims to ensure a future where the percentage of Black eye doctors

matches their representation in the current U.S. population, VSP Vision and Black EyeCare Perspective toured historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to increase awareness about career opportunities in the optometric industry, as well as to provide students with access to vision care through the Impact HBCU Project.

Through these stops at Florida A&M University, North Carolina Central University, Tennessee State University and Paul Quinn College, VSP Eyes of Hope provided free vision care to 285 students.

As we progress into the end of the year, VSP Vision's Giving Season Initiative focuses on children's literacy and providing free vision care for

children who can't otherwise afford it. In that spirit, the VSP Eyes of Hope mobile clinics will be making stops at various schools throughout the season.

In partnership with Bess the Book Bus and BT Washington Elementary School in Tampa—a community that is recovering from the impacts of Hurricane Helene—Eyes of Hope will provide free eye exams and prescription eyewear to students in need. Students will also be able to stop at Bess the Book Bus to select a free book alongside their eyewear. In 2025, McNeil said, VSP Eyes of Hope will add a new, fully equipped mobile clinic to its fleet, bringing more care to patients across the United States. ■



VSP Eyes of Hope mobile clinics are staffed by site leaders, VSP network doctors, VSP Vision employees from across the country and a driver.