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Consumer and Taxpayer Advocates, Retailers and Technology Companies Join Forces in New Coalition to Advocate for Online Vision Care

Group Will Fight Against Legislation Restricting Access to Online Prescription Renewal Services

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Leading consumer and taxpayer advocates, retailers and technology companies have joined forces to launch Americans for Vision Care Innovation, a new coalition advocating for access to online vision care for American consumers. The group will encourage states to adopt legislation allowing vision care telehealth services, including online vision testing and online prescription renewal for glasses and contact lens wearers, and to end restrictions on such services where they exist. It will also fight against legislation that would roll back access to online vision care services in the states where it is currently allowed. Online vision care can save consumers time and money, increase convenience, improve access to care for rural and medically-underserved communities and promote good eye health. The group’s initial members include:

- Americans for Tax Reform;
- Center for Freedom and Prosperity;
- Citizen Outreach;
- Consumer Action;
- Lens.com;
- League of United Latin American Citizens;
- National Hispanic Medical Association;
- National Taxpayers Union;
- Opternative;
- Progressive Policy Institute;
- R Street Institute;
- Smart Vision Labs; and
- 1-800 Contacts.

“Vision care telehealth is a win-win for American consumers, increasing convenience, bringing down costs and expanding access to care,” said **Ken McEldowney, Executive Director of Consumer Action**. “State leaders should be embracing these technologies and encouraging their use, not putting up roadblocks.”

“Online vision care services have the potential to produce significant savings for taxpayers,” said **Pete Sepp, President of National Taxpayers Union**. “State and federal governments pay millions of dollars annually for eye care services for government employees and for Americans who receive benefits under government-funded health insurance and other programs. These costs can be substantially reduced if covered individuals have access to online vision care.”

“Opternative and other online vision care providers are using cutting edge technology to provide a convenient and cost effective tool for consumers to renew prescriptions when in-person eye exams are not needed,” said **Dr. Steven Lee, Co-Founder and Chief Science Officer of Opternative**. “We are hopeful that more states will adopt legislation formally approving the use of these tools and that states currently restricting their use will change course and recognize their value.”

Americans are increasingly turning to online telehealth services to meet basic health needs. One of the most exciting advances in telehealth has been in the area of online prescription renewal services for America’s 160 million glasses wearers and 40 million contact lens wearers. Using innovative technologies, consumers in 39 states can now have their vision tested and contact lens prescriptions renewed remotely by an ophthalmologist licensed in their state.

Unfortunately, some states have moved to outlaw these services, caving to political pressure from lobbyists representing optometrists, including the American Optometric Association (AOA), and contact lens manufacturers. These contact lens industry players see this technology as a threat to their market share. Rather than incorporating the technologies to benefit their patients – they are pressuring state legislators to ban them.

Optometrists, who are not medical doctors like ophthalmologists, receive about 60 percent of their revenue from the sale of glasses and contact lenses. Any technology that results in fewer in-person office visits has a potential to cut into their sales and profits. Contact lens manufacturers, meanwhile, use incentive payments to optometrists to motivate them to prescribe their brands to customers. Since online vision care potentially impacts which eye care providers are issuing prescriptions, manufacturers fear that their ability to gain market share through these optometrists will be weakened.

Since the beginning of 2016, bills attempting to outlaw or restrict online vision testing technologies have been introduced in almost a dozen states. These bills have been pushed even though there have been no reported cases of injuries or complaints resulting from use of the technology. Promotion of these bills by the AOA and lens manufacturers is clearly intended to hold consumers’ prescriptions hostage, forcing them into optometrists’ offices every year for expensive comprehensive exams in the hope that those consumers will purchase lenses directly from optometrists. With no evidence that online vision care services are detrimental to health and safety, it appears that opponents are focused primarily on protecting their profits and market share—not consumers.

Learn more about Americans for Vision Care Innovation at:
www.americansforvisioncareinnovation.org.

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