

## **Vision health is an essential component of holistic wellbeing**

By Ambika Salwan

Public health has always inspired me because it gets to the root of health by preventing illness, promoting well-being, and creating healthier environments for whole communities. I've always been drawn to its proactive nature. Instead of just treating disease once it appears, public health focuses on addressing the causes before they take hold, which ultimately improves quality of life through policy, education, and community engagement. My background has shown me how powerful evidence-based interventions can be, especially when they help close gaps in access and knowledge for people who might otherwise be left behind.

Within this field, I've found a special passion for eye health. Vision is so central to independence, learning, and daily life, yet eye safety and preventive care are often overlooked until problems arise. Many causes of vision loss, such as workplace injuries, UV damage, diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma, are preventable with awareness and early intervention. My fellowship project is focused on teaching young students about eye safety during sports and physical play. Building these habits early can help prevent injuries and set the stage for lifelong eye health. Public health strategies in vision care can make a real difference, especially in lower-income communities where access to care and protective resources is limited.

Education is key to this work. Teaching people about protective eyewear, the importance of regular checkups, and the role lifestyle plays in vision can help build long-term practices that preserve sight. It also helps break down misconceptions, such as the idea that vision loss is just a normal part of aging and encourages people to seek care earlier.

I care deeply about this work because of its ripple effect. Protecting someone's vision does not only support their health, but it also protects their independence, productivity, and ability to stay connected with others. Eye safety and education are not just medical issues; they are about equity, dignity, and opportunity. By addressing disparities in eye health and safety among lower-income populations, my Albert Schweitzer Fellowship project is a humanitarian effort that meets a real need that would otherwise go unmet. That is why I am committed to this path, and why public health will always be at the core of how I hope to make a difference.

*Ambika Salwan is a 2025-26 Albert Schweitzer Fellow and a medical student at the Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine. This blog was written in conjunction with World Humanitarian Day on Aug. 19.*