Our purpose is to provide a summary overview of blindness and visual impairment on the context of recent Brazilian ocular epidemiologic studies. Synthesis of data from two cross-sectional population-based studies - the São Paulo Eye Study and the Refractive Error in School Children Study is presented. 3678 older adults and 2441 school children were examined between July 2004 and December 2005. Prevalence of blindness in older adults using presenting visual acuity was 1.51% decreasing to 1.07% with refractive correction. The most common causes of blindness in older adults were retinal disorders, followed by cataract and glaucoma. In school children, the prevalence of uncorrected visual impairment was 4.82% decreasing to 0.41% with refractive correction. The most common cause of visual impairment in school children was uncorrected refractive error. Visual impairment and blindness in Brazil is an important public health problem. It is a significant problem in older Brazilians, reinforcing the need to implement prevention of blindness programs for elderly people with emphasis on those without schooling. In school-children cost-effective strategies are needed to address a readily treatable cause of vision impairment - prescription and provision of glasses.

Keywords
Blindness, visual impairment, prevalence, population-based, ocular epidemiology.