

Debate Pack

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A blueprint for eye health in England and the devolved nations

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Summary

A Westminster Hall debate has been scheduled for Thursday 15 December from 1.30pm on “A blueprint for eye health in England and the devolved nations”. The debate will be opened by Jim Shannon MP.

1 Background

[The NHS has estimated](#) that more than 2 million people are living with sight loss in the UK.¹ Of these, around 340,000 are registered as blind or partially sighted.

The [Royal National Institute of Blind People \(RNIB\) reports that](#) around 60% of people living with sight loss are women.² It also notes that older age is a significant risk factor related to eye health and sight loss.

The RNIB's website provides [further information on the criteria for certification of sight loss](#), known as a [Certificate of Vision Impairment](#) in England, and how sight loss is measured.

[The NHS recommends that](#) most people should have their eyes tested every two years.³ Some groups who are at increased risk of eye problems, may need to have a sight test more often.

As of October 2022, the waiting list for consultant-led ophthalmology treatment in England was 642,000. This has increased by 47% since October 2019, when the waiting list was 448,000. 4.5% of those on the waiting list in October 2022 had been waiting over one year for treatment.⁴

1.1 Causes of sight loss

The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified the leading causes of vision impairment globally:

- age-related macular degeneration (blurring or loss of central vision, which you need to see straight ahead);
- cataract (when the lens of the eye develops cloudy patches);
- diabetic retinopathy (high blood sugar levels damaging the retina);
- glaucoma (damage to the optic nerve connecting the eye to the brain);
- uncorrected refractive errors (blurred vision, such as that caused by myopia (short-sightedness)).⁵

¹ NHS, [Blindness and vision loss](#), accessed 13 December 2022

² RNIB, [Key information and statistics on sight loss in the UK](#), accessed 13 December 2022

³ NHS, [How often can I have a free NHS sight test?](#), accessed 14 December 2022

⁴ NHS England, Consultant-Led Referral to Treatment Waiting Times

⁵ WHO, [Blindness and vision impairment](#), accessed 13 December 2022

Most sight loss in the UK is caused by uncorrected refractive errors (two in five cases), age-related macular degeneration (one in five) or cataract (one in five).⁶

1.2

Risk factors

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Eye Institute in the United States provides a searchable database of [Eye Conditions and Diseases](#). It features information about symptoms, diagnosis, treatments and risk factors. Risk factors for eye conditions can include being overweight or obese, smoking and pre-existing health conditions.

The RNIB explains that certain ethnic groups have a greater risk of developing some of the leading causes of sight loss:

- Black African and Caribbean people are four to eight times more at risk of developing certain forms of glaucoma.
- The risk of diabetic eye disease is around three times greater in South Asian people.
- Black African and Caribbean people are also at a higher risk of diabetic eye disease.⁷

1.3

Impact of sight loss

The [WHO explains](#) the potential impact of sight loss and that this may vary according to age.⁸

Young children with early onset severe vision impairment might experience delayed motor, language, social and cognitive development, with lifelong consequences. They may also experience lower academic achievement.

The WHO sets out that adults with vision impairment often have lower rates of workforce participation and productivity, with higher rates of depression and anxiety.

In older adults, vision impairment can contribute to social isolation, difficulty walking, a higher risk of falls and fractures, and a greater likelihood of early entry into nursing or care homes.

⁶ RNIB, [Key information and statistics on sight loss in the UK](#), accessed 13 December 2022

⁷ RNIB, [Key information and statistics on sight loss in the UK](#), accessed 13 December 2022

⁸ WHO, [Blindness and vision impairment](#), accessed 14 December 2022

The RNIB, however, notes significant variations in people's experiences of sight loss with some factors being particularly determinant:

- Adapting to sight loss – the extent to which an individual, with appropriate support at the right times, has adapted to sight loss.
- Demographics - such as age or whether or not someone has additional disabilities.
- Onset and severity of sight loss – when someone experienced sight loss and the extent of their sight loss.⁹

The [NHS website](#) provides information and advice for people experiencing sight loss on how to make adaptations such as in the home, reading and writing and getting around.¹⁰

The Government [has not undertaken](#) a recent assessment of the potential economic impact of sight loss,¹¹ but highlighted [estimates published by Deloitte Access Economics](#) :

The economic cost of sight loss and blindness was estimated at £36.0 billion in the UK in 2019. This included £3.4 billion in healthcare system costs, £7.8 billion in productivity losses and other financial costs, and £24.8 billion in reduced wellbeing. The financial cost of sight loss and blindness was estimated to be £16,867 per person with sight loss and blindness.¹²

⁹ RNIB, [Key statistics about sight loss](#), September 2021

¹⁰ NHS, [Blindness and vision loss](#), accessed 14 December 2022

¹¹ [PQ 84900](#), 2 December 2022

¹² Deloitte, [Impact of Covid-19 on sight loss and blindness in the UK](#), August 2021

2 Eye health strategies across the UK

2.1 UK Vision Strategy

The [UK Vision Strategy](#), published in 2012, was a five year strategy led by ‘Vision 2020’ – an initiative that brought together health professionals, key sight loss charities and stakeholder groups, and was supported by the Government.¹³

It set three outcomes:

- Improving the eye health of the people of the UK.
- Eliminating avoidable sight loss and delivering excellent support for people with sight loss.
- Inclusion, participation and independence for people with sight loss.¹⁴

Vision 2020 later became ‘Vision UK’. It appears to have ceased operating in the summer of 2020.¹⁵

2.2 England

There is no eye health strategy for England. The Government [said](#), in September 2022, that it had no current plans for a national eye strategy as eye care services are commissioned locally to meet the needs of the local population.¹⁶

In November 2022, Marsha De Cordova [put forward a motion](#) calling for a Bill to require the Secretary of State to publish a national eye health strategy for England. She proposed that the strategy would include measures for improving eye health outcomes, reducing waiting times for eye health care, improving patient experiences of eye health care, ensuring that providers of eye health care work together in an efficient way, increasing the capacity and skills of the eye health care workforce, and making more effective use of research and innovation in eye health care.¹⁷

¹³ [PQ HL2226 \[on Eyesight\]](#), 25 October 2016

¹⁴ Vision 2020, [UK Vision Strategy. Setting the direction for eye health and sight loss services](#), 2012, p7-8

¹⁵ The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, [Vision 2020 National bodies: UK](#), 13 August 2020; [Vision UK \(@VisionUKGB\) / Twitter](#)

¹⁶ [PQ 40926](#), 5 September 2022

¹⁷ HC Deb, [National Eye Health Strategy](#), Vol 723, 29 November 2022,

2.3

Wales

Together for Health: Eye Health Care Delivery Plan for Wales 2013-2018

The Welsh Government published a five-year plan to improve eye health in Wales and support those living with sight loss; [Together for Health: Eye Health Care Delivery Plan for Wales 2013-2018 \(PDF\)](#).

It sets out a range of key actions to improve the eye health of all children and adults in Wales, particularly those most vulnerable to eye health problems and sight loss.

The Plan set out the Welsh Government's key priorities on eye health:

- Preventing avoidable sight loss and improving eye health.
- Early identification of poor eye health and sight problems.
- Providing high quality, efficient, accessible services.
- Ensuring integration of services and patient focussed delivery.
- Providing care and support for people living with sight/dual sensory impairment.¹⁸

The Welsh Government committed to working with Public Health Wales and eye care professionals to develop an eye health promotion and public education strategy for the general public, at risk groups and children, and increase awareness of eye health amongst health and care professionals.

Public Health Wales was tasked with seeking opportunities to link eye health issues to other health awareness campaigns, such as diabetes, smoking and falls.

In 2014, the Welsh Government [published a report \(PDF\)](#) discussing progress following the publication of [Together for Health: Eye Health Care Delivery Plan for Wales 2013-2018 \(PDF\)](#) in 2013.¹⁹ It reported on key outcome and assurance measures, such as the number of new certifications of visual impairment, the number of people referred to smoking cessation services by optometrists and adult awareness of the importance of eye health.

¹⁸ NHS Wales and Welsh Government, [Together for Health: Eye Health Care](#), Delivery Plan for Wales, 2013-2018 (PDF), 2013, p3

¹⁹ Welsh Government, [Together for Health: Eye Health Care Delivery Plan \(2013 - 2018\), Report 2014](#)

NHS Wales Eye Health Care: Future Approach for Optometry Services - 2021

In March 2021, the Welsh Government published [NHS Wales Eye Health Care: Future Approach for Optometry Services](#), setting out its expectations for delivery of eye care services over the next decade. It set out three core aims:

- For the ambitions of this paper to be met, the priority is to continue to embed the aims of “A Healthier Wales” and the “Together for Health: Eye Care Delivery Plan 2013-20”. To provide eye health care close to a patient’s home, to prevent unnecessary referrals to GPs and hospitals, ensuring timely access for specialist treatment of blinding eye disease that only an ophthalmologist can manage.
- To progress work at pace, and to facilitate our national approach for eye health care services across Wales, a fully integrated workforce, and eye care pathways without boundaries are paramount. The underlying principle is to ensure ‘eye health’ is the focus of good eye care and health professionals are working together across all eye care pathways to provide appropriate care and for patients to receive the best possible outcomes.
- To enable this shift towards a wholly clinical approach to eye health care, building upon the current service delivery models in optometry and removing barriers to change are vital.²⁰

2.4

Scotland

The Scottish Government published [See Hear: A strategic framework for meeting the needs of people with a sensory impairment in Scotland](#) in April 2014. This followed a [public consultation](#) on a draft strategy between April and June 2013.

The Strategy focused on ensuring that adults and children with a sensory impairment receive sufficient provision with respect to assessment, care and support, and the same access to employment, education, leisure, healthcare and social care as those without a sensory impairment,

Several areas for actions and recommendations were identified in the Strategy, including that local partnerships should consider options for the introduction of basic sensory checks, such as for people of a certain age, and at agreed times in their care pathway.

It also made recommendations on awareness, education and training for professional groups, ensuring that service providers evidence that their

²⁰ Welsh Government, [NHS Wales eye health care: future approach for optometry services](#), last updated 19 March 2021

service planning provides for those with sensory loss, and that agencies review their compliance with equalities legislation.

2.5

Northern Ireland

Developing Eyecare Partnerships: Improving the Commissioning and Provision of Eyecare Services in Northern Ireland, 2012

The then Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety published its strategy, [Developing Eyecare Partnerships: Improving the Commissioning and Provision of Eyecare Services in Northern Ireland](#) (DEP strategy), in 2012. It set out the strategic direction for eyecare services in Northern Ireland for the next five years, with four core goals:

- Identify potential sight-threatening problems at a much earlier stage;
- Contribute to the independence of adults and maintaining them well in the community, for as long as possible, by improving access to current HSC treatment for acute and/or long-term eye conditions;
- Contribute to the improvement of life chances for children, including those children living with disabilities, through improving access to eyecare services and treatment for acute and long-term conditions; and
- Maximise use of health and social care resources in both primary and secondary care services.

The strategy's implementation has been sponsored and overseen by the Department of Health, while the Health and Social Care Board and Public Health Agency co-led on the strategy's implementation between 2013 and 2017.²¹

Review of the 2012 strategy

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) is responsible for monitoring and inspecting the availability and quality of health and social care services in Northern Ireland. In 2019, the RQIA published a [Review of the Implementation of the Developing Eyecare Partnerships Strategy](#) (PDF). Stakeholders considered that the strategy had facilitated service improvement and development.

²¹ RQIA, [Review of the implementation of the Developing Eyecare Partnerships Strategy](#), September 2019

The Review Team noted evidence of good progress across a number of areas but identified a particular concern about an increasing demand for ophthalmology services within secondary care. They were particularly concerned that patients may be experiencing harm due to delays in new and review appointments within secondary care for a range of eye conditions, including wet-age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.

The Review Team considered that the objectives of the DEP Strategy did not fully meet the overall DEP project aims, meaning that “full delivery of the strategy was going to be challenging from the outset”.²²

The Review Team recommended that the Department of Health, the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency, exercise responsibility for patient safety and increase its focus on the waiting list for eyecare services.

The Review Team also recommended that, following the standing down of the DEP strategy, an Eyecare Network should be established as a successor to the DEP strategy.

National awareness campaign

In September 2022, the then Health Minister Robin Swann [expressed support](#) for a nationwide awareness campaign called #EyeCareWeCare, aimed at highlighting the importance of eye health to avoid preventable sight loss.²³

The campaign is being led by RNIB, the Department of Health, the Public Health Agency and Optometry who form a coalition called the Northern Ireland Eyecare Network.

²² RQIA, [Review of the implementation of the Developing Eyecare Partnerships Strategy](#), September 2019

²³ Health and Social Care, [Health Minister supports campaign to combat unnecessary sight loss](#), 26 September 2022

3

NHS eye services in England

NHS England is responsible for commissioning primary care services for the population of England, including optometry.²⁴ NHS England's commissioning policy is to move towards more place based, clinically led commissioning.

Since July 2022 Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) are responsible for commissioning secondary care ophthalmology services and may also commission primary care services, such as minor eye services and monitoring, in the community, to meet identified need. NHS England has responsibility for the General Optical Services contract – which covers the basic NHS sight test – with enhanced services being individually commissioned by ICBs. Enhanced services include acute eyecare services, glaucoma repeat measures, and pre and post cataract assessment. NHS England estimates that optometry practices provide “more than 13 million NHS sight tests across England per year.”²⁵

Before the pandemic NHS England established initiatives to address unnecessary delays in follow-up care. The Local Optical Committee Support Unit (LOCSU) provides information on how improvement programmes have subsequently adapted to support Covid service recovery:

Over recent years the NHS has been seeking to reform care through pathway and service integration. Pre 2020 this was via the National Outpatient Transformation Project which commenced in 2018/19. As the covid pandemic impacted on the UK and NHS throughout 2020 the project evolved to become part of the National Pathway Improvement Programme.

The NHS pathway improvement program brings together all NHS *improvement* programmes and aims to avoid duplication of effort, by coordinating resources so that transformation is delivered across the whole pathway. Eyecare pathway transformation will be the vanguard for NHS transformation via the National Eye Care Recovery and Transformation Programme.

The programme has three core high level aims:

- To improve experience, outcomes, safety and quality of care for patients in a sustainable and efficient way.
- Set out a bold but grounded digital approach to transforming eye care, to improve clinical outcomes, patient experience and productivity.

²⁴ [NHS England, Optometry commissioning](#)

²⁵ [NHS England, Eye health](#)

- In so doing, create a replicable model for NHS digital transformation, focussed on what opportunities for improvement to embrace, and how to scale their adoption across a federated system.²⁶

Further information on the NECRTP can be found on [the Royal College of Ophthalmologists' \(RCOphth\) website](#), and in a response to a Parliamentary Question in October 2021 ([PQ54010, 18 October 2021](#)). The RCOphth website published an article in June 2022 setting out progress and next steps for the NECRTP.²⁷

In August 2022 Louisa Wickham, consultant ophthalmologist and medical director at Moorfields Eye Hospital, was appointed by NHS England as the first ever national clinical director for eye care.²⁸

²⁶ LOCSU, [National Eye Care Recovery and Transformation Programme](#), 14 May 2021

²⁷ The Royal College of Ophthalmologists [One year on from the National Eye Care Recovery and Transformation Programme: progress and next steps | \(rcophth.ac.uk\)](#)

²⁸ [Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust](#), August 2022

4 Parliamentary material

4.1 Debates

[National Eye Health Strategy](#)

29 Nov 2022 | Debates on bills | House of Commons | 723 cc799-802

4.2 Parliamentary questions

[Ophthalmic Services: Special Educational Needs](#)

29 Nov 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 92154

Asked by: Sir Robert Neill

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many eye care professionals are delivering the NHS Special School Eye Care Service under Primary Ophthalmic Service contracts.

Answered by: Neil O'Brien | Department of Health and Social Care

As of November 2022, there are 40 optometrists and 33 dispensing opticians contributing to the delivery of the NHS Special Schools Eye Care Service, under Primary Ophthalmic Services contracts. However, the number providing the service in schools will vary from month to month.

The Department regularly discusses eyecare services with NHS England, which has commissioned an independent evaluation of the special schools' proof-of-concept pilot programme to inform future National Health Service commissioning decisions. The Department will discuss future plans for the service with NHS England once the evaluation has concluded early in 2023.

[Ophthalmic Services: Special Educational Needs](#)

29 Nov 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 92153

Asked by: Sir Robert Neill

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent discussions his Department has had with NHS England on its plans for the NHS Special Schools Eye Care Service.

Answered by: Neil O'Brien | Department of Health and Social Care

As of November 2022, there are 40 optometrists and 33 dispensing opticians contributing to the delivery of the NHS Special Schools Eye Care Service, under Primary Ophthalmic Services contracts. However, the number providing the service in schools will vary from month to month.

The Department regularly discusses eyecare services with NHS England, which has commissioned an independent evaluation of the special schools' proof-of-concept pilot programme to inform future National Health Service commissioning decisions. The Department will discuss future plans for the service with NHS England once the evaluation has concluded early in 2023.

[Ophthalmic Services: Waiting Lists](#)

22 Nov 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 86453

Asked by: Dr Matthew Offord

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the impact of ophthalmology waiting times on patient outcomes.

Answered by: Will Quince | Department of Health and Social Care

No formal assessment has been made. Since April 2020, NHS England has required all commissioners to agree service development and improvement plans for ophthalmology with providers. This includes the implementation of the recommendations made by the Health Safety Investigation Branch.

NHS England has published practical guides, pathways and tools to support local teams to increase service productivity through the Getting It Right First Time and the National Eye Care Recovery Programmes. NHS England has also appointed a National Clinical Director for Eyecare and is developing a national eyecare transformation programme to work with eye care stakeholders.

[Visual Impairment: Research](#)

21 Nov 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 86454

Asked by: Dr Matthew Offord

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential economic benefits of additional funding in sight loss research.

Answered by: Will Quince | Department of Health and Social Care

No specific assessment has been made. The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including sight loss research, although it is not usual practice to ring-fence funds for particular topics or conditions. Applications are subject to peer review and judged in open competition, with awards made on the basis of the importance of the topic to patients and health and care services, value for money and scientific quality. In the last five years, the NIHR has invested more than £100 million for eye conditions research, including studies which focus on sight loss.

[Ophthalmic Services: Staff](#)

15 Nov 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 82418

Asked by: Emma Hardy

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to expand the size of the ophthalmology work force.

Answered by: Neil O'Brien | Department of Health and Social Care

The Department has commissioned NHS England to develop a long-term workforce plan. The plan will consider the number of staff and the roles required and will set out the actions and reforms needed to improve workforce supply and retention.

Health Education England has confirmed an increase in ophthalmology training places for 2022 and training and development is available for the wider existing workforce, including orthoptists, ophthalmic nurses, optometrists and dispensing opticians, to support staff to work to the full extent of their licence.

NHS England is also working with the Royal College of Ophthalmologists to support cataract training in the National Health Service and independent sector and to determine which hospital eye care services can be safely moved into the community, supported virtually through digital technology by secondary care specialists.

[Ophthalmic Services: Children](#)

14 Nov 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 80684

Asked by: Bob Blackman

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the impact of the NHS Special Schools Eye Care Service on local hospital paediatric ophthalmology services.

Answered by: Neil O'Brien | Department of Health and Social Care

NHS England has commissioned an independent evaluation of their proof-of-concept pilot programme, which has been providing in-school sight testing for children and young people with learning disabilities and/or autism in special schools.

Views are being sought from a range of stakeholders on the benefits of the Special Schools Eye Care Service. Views to date, include the impact of the pilot on paediatric ophthalmology services, which will be taken into account in the evaluation.

Official data, including information on previous eye care provided and the number of first sight tests provided under the pilot, is not presently finalised but will be considered as part of the evaluation.

[Ophthalmic Services](#)

08 Nov 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 78649

Asked by: Andrew Gwynne

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of appointing a single minister for eye care on (a) service integration and (b) continuity of care.

Answered by: Neil O'Brien | Department of Health and Social Care

NHS England has appointed a National Clinical Director for eye care to oversee the recovery and longer-term transformation of eye care services. Through this programme, NHS England is reviewing which services can be moved safely into the community, supported by secondary care specialists utilising digital technology. The transformation programme will also consider how ophthalmology data is collected and used to inform the future planning of services.

[Ophthalmic Services: Databases](#)

08 Nov 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 78648

Asked by: Andrew Gwynne

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve data collection in NHS ophthalmology services.

Answered by: Neil O'Brien | Department of Health and Social Care

NHS England has appointed a National Clinical Director for eye care to oversee the recovery and longer-term transformation of eye care services. Through this programme, NHS England is reviewing which services can be moved safely into the community, supported by secondary care specialists utilising digital technology. The transformation programme will also consider how ophthalmology data is collected and used to inform the future planning of services.

[Ophthalmic Services](#)

07 Nov 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 78736

Asked by: Ferrier, Margaret

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking with the devolved Administrations to improve eye health care across the UK.

Answered by: Neil O'Brien | Department of Health and Social Care

The provision of eye care services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a devolved matter. In England, free eye tests and optical vouchers are provided to contribute towards the cost of glasses, with over 12 million National Health Service sight tests provided in 2021/22. NHS England has

recently appointed a National Clinical Director for eye care to oversee the post pandemic recovery and long term transformation of optical services.

We are supporting research into diagnosis, prevention and treatment of eye conditions, including a £20 million award to the National Institute for Health and Care Research's (NIHR) Moorfields Biomedical Research Centre for vision research. Through the NIHR, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland work on a range of topics and the devolved administrations co-fund several research programmes.

[Home Care Services: Ophthalmic Services](#)

Asked by: De Cordova, Marsha

03 Nov 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 72453

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impacts of the requirement for domiciliary eye-care providers to submit a pre-visit notification to NHS England on (a) those providers' levels of administrative work and (b) patient wait times.

Answered by: Neil O'Brien | **Department:** Department of Health and Social Care

The current regulatory framework for domiciliary eye care services requires contractors to provide at least 48 hours' notice to NHS England of the intention to provide National Health Service sight testing services to two patients at the same address and at least three weeks' notice where contractors intend to provide services to three or more patients. The current framework also allows for contractors to see up to three additional urgent cases without notice on the day of a planned visit.

The Department and NHS England are in discussions with the eye care profession on whether there is a need to amend the legal framework for domiciliary services, including the potential review of pre-visit notifications.

[Visual Impairment: Older People](#)

02 Aug 2022 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL1971

Asked by: Lord Low of Dalston

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to raise awareness of common eye conditions that affect elderly people, such as geographic atrophy, among clinicians and patients.

Answered by: Lord Kamall | Department of Health and Social Care

Regulated healthcare professionals are required to maintain their clinical knowledge through continued professional learning as part of their registration to practice.

In 2022, NHS England has developed 28 eye care related videos for patients, which include information on age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma and cataracts. These videos are shared by clinicians with patients, including the elderly and some have been promoted on social media.

NHS England provides online resources for clinicians and commissioners of eye care services through the Future NHS Eye Care Hub. The National Health Service also provides online information on a range of eye care conditions for patients and their carers, including age-related macular degeneration. The Department also participates in National Eye Health Week, to promote the importance of good eye health, the need for regular sight tests and the availability of free NHS sight tests for eligible groups, including those aged 60 years old and over

[Eye Health](#)

19 Jul 2022 | Oral questions - 1st Supplementary | Answered | House of Commons | 718 c830

Asked by: Marsha De Cordova

Fifty per cent. of all sight loss is avoidable, but currently there is no overarching strategy in England to govern eye care that would help to reduce sight loss. A strategy for England would improve the quality of life for people who are blind or partially sighted, address health inequalities, and link up patient pathways for overall improved health outcomes. Does the Minister therefore agree that England needs its own national eye care strategy, which would include targets for the reduction of avoidable sight loss, and will he agree to meet me to discuss this further?

Answered by: James Morrison | Department of Health and Social Care

Given the size of England and the diversity of the health needs of different communities, we believe that commissioning should be locally led, so there are no current plans for a national eye health strategy. However, I am delighted that NHS England has appointed the first-ever national clinical director for eye care, Louisa Wickham, who will want to set priorities in this area. It is also worth mentioning that we continue to be committed to the national eye care recovery and transformation programme, which is looking to transform secondary care ophthalmology services in order to use existing funding to improve service quality and patient outcomes. That remains a top priority for us.

5

News articles

[Eye care in Scotland surveyed](#)

Optician

9 December 2022

[“We are currently facing an emergency when it comes to eye care and eye health in the UK”](#)

Optometry Today

24 November 2022

[Eye health will be a casualty of the cost-of-living crisis, AOP warns](#)

Optometry Today

23 November 2022

[It's time we recognise eye health as an emergency – we need a national strategy](#)

Politics Home

13 October 2022

[Eye health should be the focus for post-pandemic office workers](#)

HR News

16 September 2022

[NHS delays: Avoidable blindness fears over eye care waits](#)

BBC

29 June 2022

6

Further information

[State of the UK's Eye Health 2022](#)

Specsavers

[Fight for Sight, eye research and the fight for an end to sight loss](#)

Fight for Sight

[Tackling the challenges in eye care](#)

Macular Society

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