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Government prioritises eye health and the fight against preventable sight loss

The optical bodies have commended Government for making the first ever national commitment to tackle preventable sight loss.

Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Improving outcomes and supporting transparency, published today, sets the national public health priorities for England and includes a measure of eye health. The indicator will measure the number of people losing their sight from the three main causes of preventable sight loss: glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and diabetic retinopathy. Without action it is estimated that there will be 2.45 million people living with sight loss in the UK by 2020 and 4 million by 2050. Half of all sight loss is preventable.

Speaking on behalf of the Association of Optometrists (AOP), part of the Optical Confederation, David Craig, AOP Director of Operations, said: "I am delighted that the Government has announced the inclusion of an eye health indicator in the Public Health Outcomes Framework. The Government recognises eye health as a public health priority and this major achievement demonstrates the power of partnership working and the successes it can bring."

Dr Cindy Tromans, President of the College of Optometrists which recently brought eye care bodies together to publish *An optical sector strategy to improve ophthalmic public health*, also welcomed the Government's decision. Dr Tromans said: "The Government has set us all a great new challenge. Working together with the NHS and local authorities, optometrists can make today's announcement a real turning point in the fight against preventable sight loss."

As part of the *Optical sector strategy*, the Local Optical Committee Support Unit is working with all stakeholders to develop an Ophthalmic Public Health Network for launch later this Spring. The virtual network will bring together all those working on or interested in ophthalmic public health including NHS commissioners, Joint Health and Wellbeing Boards, providers, public health experts and academic departments. It will encourage the sharing of expertise and innovation to improve ophthalmic health outcomes across the whole population.

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For further information

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Notes to Editors

- Formed in 1946, the Association of Optometrists (AOP) represents individual optometrists in negotiations with government and other organisations. It also promotes the profession and development of high professional and clinical standards. Find out more: www.aop.org.uk
- The eye health indicator in *Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Improving outcomes and supporting transparency* will measure the rate of sight loss through chronic glaucoma, age related macular degeneration (AMD) and diabetic retinopathy per 100,000 of the population. The data used will be based on CVI (certificate of visual impairment) registrations and will be measured annually.
- A UK Vision Strategy Partnership including Royal National Institute of Blind People, Royal College of Ophthalmologists, the Optical Confederation and College of Optometrists lobbied for a Public Health Outcomes Indicator to be included in the Public Health Outcomes Framework.
- The number of people in the UK with sight loss is set to increase dramatically. It is predicted that by 2050 the number of people with sight loss in the UK will double to nearly four million (Source: Access Economics, 2009)
- Eye care costs (direct and indirect) in 2008 were £6.5 billion. By 2013 these costs will have risen to £7.9 billion. (Source: Access Economics, 2009). Preventing sight loss can drastically reduce these costs.
- There are significant health inequalities in ophthalmic public health. People in lower socio-economic groups are more likely to suffer from poor ophthalmic health and less likely to access services. Ethnicity is a factor in eye conditions; for example, white and Chinese populations are more susceptible to AMD whereas South Asian and African-Caribbean ethnic groups are at greater risk of developing diabetic retinopathy. African-Caribbean people are also at higher risk of developing glaucoma.
- People at all ages are at risk of sight loss but the risk increases with age. Older people who do lose their sight are more likely to experience poorer physical health, less economic well-being and engage in less social and civic participation leading to low quality of life and poor psychological well-being. Visual impairment is associated with a significant increased risk of falls and as well a reduced ability to live independently.
- *An optical sector strategy to improve ophthalmic public health*, is available to download at <http://www.college-optometrists.org/en/knowledge-centre/PublicAffairs/optical-sector-strategical-documents.cfm>
- *Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Improving outcomes and supporting transparency* is available from <http://www.dh.gov.uk/health/2012/01/public-health-outcomes/>