



Association of
Optometrists



We're facing a national eye health crisis that needs to be addressed now



Our research shows that people are being forced to make decent vision an optional "extra" — a truly concerning reality. It's imperative that action is taken now to minimise the long-term damage to people's eyesight.

Adam Sampson
Chief Executive



Association of Optometrists

EYE CARE & THE COST OF LIVING

What the public are saying...

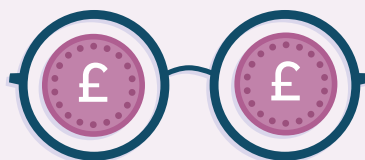
At the moment I have a pair of reading glasses from the pound shop, because I don't have any spare money to get an eye test and new glasses and I know that they are not correct for my vision, and I have to strain my eyes to read properly.



Although my sight is very important, so is feeding my children.



I have eye strain and headaches, I need new glasses but don't have the money.



22 million
making do with poor vision
due to cost of living crisis*

*Research was carried out online among 1,002 people in the UK. The fieldwork took place in October 2022 and adhered to Market Research Society guidelines.

People across the UK deserve fair access to eye care

Since 2010, we've witnessed an erosion of NHS General Ophthalmic Services sight test fees by inflation, coupled with the failure to increase the optical voucher value for those who need it.

Failure to take action now risks long-term damage to people's eyesight and could end up costing the UK much more in the long run.

Our ask is simple; increase the NHS voucher by 12.5% now to help the five million people who rely on the NHS voucher to offset against rising costs and prevent a national eye health crisis later.

Optometrists

Optometrists are eye care professionals who test sight, identify disease and provide treatment for certain eye conditions. They are community-based: there are around 6000 primary care optical practices (commonly known as opticians) across the UK, as well as in hospitals.

It is optometrists who supply eye wear prescriptions. However, optometrists are qualified and equipped to do far more NHS work than they carry out. Many have additional, higher qualifications including the ability to prescribe medications and even those without higher qualifications have an extensive portfolio of skills that are currently underutilised.

General Ophthalmic Services

General Ophthalmic Services (GOS) is the national sight testing service. Sight testing is performed by optometrists who provide around 13 million NHS funded sight tests per year.

The sight test determines the need for optical appliances — such as glasses or contact lenses — to alleviate defects of sight and enables people to safely work, drive and care for themselves and others. It also detects the majority of UK eye disease and in particular glaucoma, a largely asymptomatic disease.

Alongside GOS sight testing is the NHS optical voucher system, this provides a cash equivalent voucher that can be used to help towards glasses or contact lenses for those on means tested benefits as well as children.

Most patients who require glasses only receive the entry level amount (£39.90), even though many of these patients require glasses for everyday tasks. In the majority of cases, patients pay an additional amount towards their glasses, which reflects the increasing inflationary pressure on optical practices to offer glasses for the optical voucher value.



Association of Optometrists

The Association of Optometrists (AOP) is the leading representative membership organisation for optometrists in the UK. We support over 82% of practising optometrists, to fulfil their professional roles to protect the nation's eye health.

For more information, visit www.aop.org.uk/costofliving

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£ THE COST OF LIVING A CRISIS IN NUMBERS

In the UK



75%

of adults need prescription eye wear*

35%

of 4–16 year-olds have been diagnosed with a vision problem*

"Putting off" eye care



Two-thirds (62%) of people who wear glasses or contact lenses are "putting off going to the opticians" for fear of the cost*



Out of date prescriptions

36% are wearing an out of date prescription*



Self-repair

19% use broken glasses they have had to self-repair*



Borrowing

Almost a third (31%) of people borrow friends' and family's eye wear to avoid spending money on their own*