



Association of
Optometrists



Cut the patient backlog

Community optometry is ready to end the eye care crisis



We are facing a health emergency. Hospitals are overrun, GPs are struggling, and the NHS is collapsing under patient need. A national strategy for eye care is essential to tackle the challenges in ophthalmology. Community optometry can reduce the backlog to improve outcomes for patients. No one should have to wait so long for an appointment it risks preventable sight loss.



Adam Sampson
Chief Executive
Association of Optometrists

End the eye care crisis in the UK

What patients are saying...

I was diagnosed over two years ago, and I am still waiting for recommended treatment.

I feel unimportant, as if nobody cares if my sight gets worse.

The staff say "see you in six weeks" but it doesn't happen.

I feel left behind and that nothing is happening to help me.

I watch for the post every day in the hope an appointment will arrive.

650,000 people

waiting for an ophthalmology appointment in England*

*NHS England. Consultant-led Referral to Treatment Waiting Times for Incomplete Pathways. June 2023.

A crisis in numbers



1 in 11 people on NHS waiting lists in England are waiting for an ophthalmology appointment¹



Nearly half (47%) report a decline or **loss in vision** while waiting²



41% of patients report being **frightened** of losing their vision entirely²



30% feel **abandoned** by the NHS or authorities²



Since 2019, there have been over **550 reports** to the National Reporting and Learning System in relation to sight loss due to delayed appointments, of which, 99 incidents involved **"severe harm"** to patients³



Reducing the prevalence of eye conditions by just 1% a year could **save £9.5 billion** by 2050⁴



What we're calling for

A national strategy for eye care is needed, with the existing primary care optometry workforce at its core.

1

Basic IT connectivity in place between primary and secondary care to speed up patient referrals

2

Extending the scope of community eye care services so more patients get the care they need, closer to home

3

Widening the prescribing powers of optometrists to alleviate pressure on GP services, hospital eye departments and A&E.

Why act now

- Every patient in England can receive high quality, specialist eye care that's affordable, when they need it
- More patients can be seen, at the right time, in their community – improving health outcomes
- Hospital eye departments can focus on patients who need to be seen by an ophthalmologist – reducing the backlog.

Fair access to sight saving appointments

Thousands of people need a hospital eye appointment that could save their sight and the number is only set to grow with an ageing population. Too many are being forced to wait, struggling with an undiagnosed or untreated condition, losing vision that is completely preventable, and often irreversible.

It doesn't have to be this way. Optometrists up and down the country are trained and ready to help if only we take action and solve the crisis in UK eye care. The situation will only get worse, and the message is clear. #SightWontWait

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 7000 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.

 For more information and how to get involved, visit www.aop.org.uk/sightwontwait

The Association of Optometrists (AOP) is the voice of the optical profession, representing over 80% of practising optometrists. The AOP elevates the work of its members, safeguards their interests, and champions eye health across the UK. For more information visit www.aop.org.uk



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