**TEMPLATE EMAIL TEXT TO INVITE YOUR LOCAL MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT TO A PRACTICE VISIT**

[NB THIS TEXT IS TAILORED FOR USE IN CONSTITUENCIES IN **ENGLAND** – PLEASE CONTACT THE AOP POLICY TEAM IF YOU WANT TO ARRANGE A PRACTICE VISIT IN ANOTHER PART OF THE UK]

Dear **[insert name of MP]**

**Invitation to discuss local eye health services and how optical practices can help take pressure off hospitals**

I am an optometrist in your constituency and I am writing to invite you to **my practice/ the practice I work in [delete as appropriate and add first line of address and post code]** to show you how our practice provides eye healthcare to your constituents and to discuss the greater role community optical practices can play in delivering healthcare services in the community.

Ophthalmology is the hospital speciality with the highest number of outpatient appointments, for the monitoring of progressive conditions such as glaucoma and macular degeneration which can progress rapidly and without initial symptoms. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic the British Ophthalmological Surveillance Unit found that up to 22 people per month experience severe and permanent sight loss due to delayed or cancelled appointments. The pandemic has of course made waiting times for hospital outpatient appointments even worse.

The Government and NHS England have recently recognised the need to deliver more eye care outside hospital, in community optical practices, to free-up hospital capacity to cope with the demands of an ageing population. Community optical practices on the high street have the trained, regulated healthcare staff and the technology needed to do this, and there are proven healthcare pathways for extended services in primary eye care which produce excellent results. However, the uptake of these pathways by local NHS commissioners in England is still patchy, creating a postcode lottery for patients.

I enclose a summary of the ‘strategy for optometry’ published by the AOP, which sets out the opportunities for primary care optical practices to help resolve the current problems with hospital capacity. Here in **[insert constituency]** we are keen to move forward with **[insert name of local Integrated Care System (ICS) or other relevant NHS commissioning body]** on the implementation of more of these tried and tested pathways, to reduce unnecessary referrals to the hospital eye service, while also freeing up GP appointments and reducing eye-related A&E visits.

The visit will also be an opportunity to discuss the importance of maintaining good eye health. Almost 2 million people in the UK are living with sight loss and this figure is set to increase to nearly 4 million people by 2050. Much of this is preventable through the early detection and treatment of eye problems. Regular sight tests are the most important tool in preventing avoidable sight loss.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you. Please do contact me if you would like to take up this invitation.

Yours sincerely