



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, 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...

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

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

The treatment is available, but I am unable to receive it in the relevant timeframe.

628,502 people

waiting for an ophthalmology appointment in England*

*NHS England, Consultant-led Referral to Treatment Times, 2023.

A crisis in numbers

1 in 11 people



on NHS waiting lists in England are waiting for an ophthalmology appointment¹



Over 27,260 who have been waiting **a year or more¹**



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



21% say they are **struggling** to do day-to-day tasks like cooking, cleaning, reading and their job²

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.

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

What we're calling for



- 1 Commitment to a national strategy for eye care, with the existing primary care optometry workforce at its core
- 2 Work with the Association of Optometrists, and the sector, to ensure investment in primary care optometry
- 3 Extend community optometry services so more people receive the care they need closer to home, reducing the backlog in eye care

The benefits...

- ➔ Every patient receives high quality care, quickly — addressing health inequalities and improving health outcomes
- ➔ Hospital eye departments focus on patients who need to be seen by an ophthalmologist
- ➔ We ensure the clinical skills of all eye care professionals are used in full

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.

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



Association of
Optometrists

The Association of Optometrists is the leading representative membership organisation for optometrists in the UK. For more information visit www.aop.org.uk