

# **The Eyes Have It**

## **Perceptions and Understanding of Eye Health in Britain**

[Print shows the following logos.]

Roche

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists

Fight for Sight

Association of Optometrists

Macular Society: Beating Macular Disease

### **Introduction**

As part of a survey for Roche, developed with the Macular Society and Fight for Sight, polling company Deltapoll surveyed 1,516 British adults in August 2021 to understand attitudes to and awareness of eye health.

Below is a summary of the results, which highlighted a discrepancy between how much people fear losing their sight and how much they prioritise steps to prevent it. Crucially, the survey

also showed a mismatch between how long people would expect to wait for NHS treatment for sight loss and the reality of waiting lists today, which have been exacerbated through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey data have been weighted to be representative of the British adult population as a whole. In the survey, sight loss was defined as 'a decreased ability to see to a degree that causes problems not fixable by usual means, such as glasses.'

## **NHS treatment for sight loss**

43% said they would expect to wait a matter of weeks or less for treatment.<sup>1</sup>

216,760 patients waited for more than 18 weeks (in Dec 2021) to access NHS ophthalmology services.<sup>2</sup>

## **Understanding of Sight Loss**

Around 2.5 million people are living with sight loss.<sup>3</sup>

But nearly half of people (48%) guessed this figure to be less than one million.<sup>1</sup>

Fewer than half (42%) thought it was likely that they personally would suffer some form of sight loss over the next ten years.<sup>1</sup>

This was true even among the 65+ age group (47%) despite the risk of sight loss increasing with age.

Around 79% of people living with sight loss in Britain are over the age of 64.<sup>4</sup>

Only one in five (20%) often talk to their older relatives about sight loss.

Whilst nearly two thirds (65%) of adults don't often think about their own eye health.<sup>1</sup>

When asked about how they would feel if they experienced sight loss, people most commonly said they would feel frightened, anxious, scared or depressed.

Loss of vision can severely impact quality of life and emotional wellbeing.

These figures indicate a lack of awareness around sight loss amongst the general public, yet this is at odds with how people prioritise sight.

The vast majority of respondents prioritised sight over all other senses.

Respondents said sight would be a worse sense to lose when compared to touch, taste, hearing or smell.<sup>1</sup>

Hearing: 79%

Touch: 87%

Taste: 81%

Smell: 83%

## **Prevention**

Two in five (40%) think it is often NOT possible to prevent eyesight problems in older people ...<sup>1</sup>

... this is despite regular eye check-ups, stopping smoking and having a healthy diet and weight all being shown to help prevent sight loss.<sup>5</sup>

Four out of five (81%) selected regular eye tests<sup>1</sup> when presented with options on how to prevent sight loss.

Despite this, only a quarter (25%) ranked having regular check-ups with an optician more important than checks with doctors and dentists.<sup>1</sup>

Only 28% said they plan to visit their opticians more frequently post-pandemic.

This is despite reports of deteriorating eyesight in Britain due to increasing screen time during pandemic.<sup>6</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The incidence of sight loss is rising.

It is predicted the number of people with sight loss will rise to over 4 million by 2050.<sup>7</sup>

Providers of NHS eye care services are struggling to keep pace with the rising demand and we know that delayed treatment leads to poorer visual outcomes. 15 – 22 patients a month will suffer severe deterioration of vision (including permanent sight loss) resulting from delays to follow up care.<sup>8</sup>

\* \* \*

Sight loss is not inevitable. But we need to act fast.

For advice and information, visit:  
[www.macularsociety.org](http://www.macularsociety.org), [www.fightforsight.org.uk](http://www.fightforsight.org.uk)  
or call the Macular Society's helpline on 0300 3030  
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## **The Eyes Have It**

**The Eyes Have It** is a partnership to promote and champion eye health. These policy proposals are jointly supported by these organisations:

**Roche** is a pioneer in pharmaceuticals and diagnostics, focused on advancing science to improve people's lives. Roche believes that more can and should be done to improve and protect vision.

**The Macular Society** is the charity dedicated to beating the fear and isolation of macular disease, by funding world-class research, and providing the best advice and support to those affected by macular conditions.

**Fight for Sight** is the leading UK charity dedicated to stopping sight loss through pioneering research. We want to create a future everyone can see.

**The Association of Optometrists** is the leading representative membership organisation for optometrists in the United Kingdom. It supports

over 82% of practising optometrists to fulfil their professional roles to protect the nation's eye health.

**The Royal College of Ophthalmologists**, founded in 1988, is an independent professional body and one of the Medical Royal Colleges.

## References

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Date of Preparation: May 2022

Roche Material Number: M-GB-00007611

