



Press Statement Issued: 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2024

## Over two million people with urgent eye care needs must be prioritised by the next Government, say leading experts<sup>1</sup>



Leading eye care experts have issued a call to the next Government to recognise the unmet needs of more than 2.2 million people across the UK who are currently living with a condition that causes visual impairment or sight loss, and as part of this, to commit to developing a long-awaited national plan for eye care in England.<sup>1</sup> The call is made by *The Eyes Have It* – a partnership of the Macular Society, Fight for Sight / Vision Foundation, Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), Association of Optometrists, Royal College of Ophthalmologists and Roche Products Ltd. Roche has funded the activities of the partnership.

Despite the potentially life-changing impacts of sight loss, there is a crisis in access to vital NHS care and treatment. In England alone, around 611,000 people are currently waiting for their first specialist appointment with an ophthalmologist, often for extended periods.<sup>2</sup> Ophthalmology also has more people waiting for a follow-up appointment than any other specialty in the NHS.<sup>3</sup>

### **Every delay can increase the risk of a person experiencing sight-loss.**

Unsurprisingly, the current situation has considerable knock-on effects for the health and care system across the UK – with treatment of eye disease costing NHS and social care services £3.9 billion per year.<sup>4</sup> And it's not just the NHS that is impacted; sight loss is also estimated to cost the wider UK economy £25.2 billion every year, and this is set to rise as the prevalence of eye conditions increases.<sup>4</sup> Reducing the prevalence of eye conditions by just one per cent each year, however, can save the UK economy a total of £9.5 billion by 2050.<sup>4</sup>

*The Eyes Have It* is therefore calling on the next Government to commit to ensuring that all those affected by eye conditions receive timely, expert care that can support the best possible outcomes. In England, this should take the form of a much-needed national plan for eye care, setting out a bold vision for delivering coordinated and strategic action across the whole of the eye care pathway. Delivering a plan, developed in consultation with experts and patients, can play a pivotal role in effectively managing patients, through measures such as improved prevention, earlier intervention and effective utilisation of workforce capacity across the whole pathway.

The time is now to future-proof eye care services and prevent avoidable sight loss. The next Government must ensure that people living with eye conditions have access to

the care, support and treatment they both need and deserve, and promote good eye health to prevent further sight loss across the UK.

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<sup>1</sup> RNIB. Sight Loss Data Tool. Available here:

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/health-social-care-education-professionals/knowledge-and-research-hub/sight-loss-data-tool/> (accessed July 2024)

<sup>2</sup> NHS England. Consultant-led Referral to Treatment Waiting Times Data 2023-24: Incomplete Commissioner, March 2024. Available here:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/rtt-waiting-times/rtt-data-2023-24/> (accessed July 2024)

<sup>3</sup> Reform. The hidden waiting list: the growing follow-up backlog. October 2023.

Available here: <https://reform.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Reform-The-Hidden-Waitlist-Embargoed.pdf> (accessed July 2024)

<sup>4</sup> Fight for Sight. Time to Focus. 2020. Available here:

<https://www.fightforsight.org.uk/media/3302/time-to-focus-report.pdf> (accessed July 2024)