



PUBLIC HEALTH WHITE PAPER

Together the Optical Confederation represents the 12,000 optometrists, the 6,000 dispensing opticians and 7,000 optical businesses in the UK who provide high quality and accessible eye care services to the whole population. The Confederation is a coalition of the five optical bodies: the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO); the Association of Contact Lens Manufacturers (ACLM); the Association of Optometrists (AOP); the Federation of Manufacturing Opticians (FMO) and the Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians (FODO).

Although we support most of the White Paper's proposals we are strongly concerned that the omission of eye health on this strategic public health document is a major oversight and a missed opportunity.

The document specifically refers to oral health and the role of pharmacists and GPs but overlooks entirely the fourth contractor profession – optometry and optics. This is not a crude craft route point but rather an issue of strategic public health importance for the nation.

Around 100 people start to lose their sight every day, approximately 50% of which is preventable. (Source RNIB). Not only does this preventable pathology have a major impact on people's well-being and the maintenance of independence but also not preventing avoidable visual impairment and blindness imposes significant downstream costs on the NHS and social care, much of which is avoidable. According to research commissioned by RNIB, the costs to society of blindness were estimated at £22 billion in 2008 including direct health care costs of £2.14 billion, indirect costs of £4.34 billion and the cost of a reduction in the stock of health capital due to premature death and the loss of healthy life at £15.51 billion.¹

Our concern is that, for years, this major public health challenge has not been addressed. There has never been a Health of the Nation report on eye care or eye health, despite the Department's nominal support of the World Health Organisation Vision 2020 goals of eliminating avoidable blindness. This deficit affects all parts of the age spectrum. The impacts on older people are well documented, including the role uncorrected visual problems play in falls; and, over the past 30 years, school screening services have been increasingly squeezed to the point where we now have large numbers of school children with uncorrected refractive error and children growing into adulthood with correctable squint and amblyopia with all the implications this has for educational achievement and social inclusion.

¹ Access Economics (2009) *Future sight loss UK (1): The economic impact of partial sight and blindness in the UK adult population*

It is for these reasons that we believe that the omission of any mention of eye health in this strategic document is a major omission and public health folly. In particular we believe that the public health outcomes framework should include an indicator on reducing avoidable sight loss.

We have also responded to the consultations on the public health outcomes framework and the commissioning and funding of public health services.

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