

About this document



This document is from Optometry Scotland, made for the 2026 Scottish Parliament election.

It was published in November 2025.

It explains what community optometry does and what we want political parties to support.

Introduction

By Eilidh Thomson, Chair of Optometry Scotland



Community optometrists and dispensing opticians work in local practices.

Optometrists work in practices across Scotland, in different towns and cities.

They help people look after their eyes.

They help protect people's sight.

They support the NHS every day.

This document shares what our members think is important.

With the right support, community optometry can do even more.

We want to work with all political parties.

We want people in Scotland to keep getting good eye care in the future.

Community optometry

in Scotland



Community optometry is part of the NHS.

People can get NHS-funded eye examinations.

In 2024 and 2025, more than 2.4 million NHS-funded eye examinations were carried out.

Scotland is the only UK country where everyone can access NHS funded eye care.

Many people trust their optometrist.

Community optometry helps people get care early.

This helps stop sight loss.

This helps reduce pressure on hospitals.

What we ask for



We are asking all political parties to support community optometry.

We are asking for action in three main areas:

- · Protect sight and prevent blindness
- · Provide more care locally
- · Support the future workforce and services

Priority one: Protect sight and prevent blindness

What we want



We want NHS-funded eye care to stay funded and available for everyone. This is done through General Ophthalmic Services, also called GOS.

We want GOS to be protected and supported.
We want it to keep up with people's needs.

Why this is important

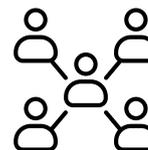


Eye tests can find problems early.
Some eye problems can cause sight loss if not treated.

Eye tests can also find other health problems.
This includes high blood pressure and diabetes.

When care happens early, fewer people need hospital treatment.

Why it matters



-
- It helps stop avoidable blindness
 - It helps stop pressure on hospitals
 - It means people can get care close to home

Case Study: Overview



A patient attended his NHS funded eye examination.

The optometrists picked up signs of high blood pressure.

The GP confirmed high blood pressure which they said is a silent killer.

The patient is happy as they are healthy and on treatment, they believe the eye exam was life saving.

From patient Kevin Kealy, NHS Lothian.

What is needed



-
- Fair and continued funding for GOS
 - Updates to keep eye care services modern
 - More people attending NHS-funded eye examinations

How this will happen



Optometry teams are ready to do more.

With training and equipment, they can expand services.

This will help patients and support the NHS.

Priority two: Shift the balance of care.

What we want



We want more eye care services delivered in the community.
This means fewer hospital visits for patients.

People should get the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

Why this is important

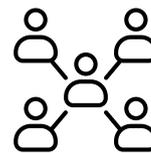


Optometrists already manage some eye conditions in the community.
This includes glaucoma and urgent eye problems.

These services work well and patients like them.
But they are not available everywhere yet.

Community care helps people get treated sooner.
It frees up hospital appointments for more serious cases.

Why it matters



- It helps shorten waiting times
- It allows better use of hospital services
- It provides care closer to home

Case Study: Community Glaucoma Service Overview



Community Glaucoma Service (CGS) runs in the community to look after those who have glaucoma.

This used to be done in hospitals, but in some health boards are done by community optometrists.

A patient who used to go to the hospital for these services now goes to her local optometrist.

They are happy with the service.

They think the optometrist explains things clearly.

They like that the appointments are easier and quicker.

Margaret Rebsch, CGS Patient, Greater Glasgow and Clyde

What is needed



-
- More community eye care services across Scotland
 - Clear ways for patients to move safely between hospital and community care
 - Better use of technology, like scans and digital referrals

How this will happen



Optometry teams are ready to do more.

With training and equipment, they can expand services.

This will help patients and support the NHS.

Priority three: Support the future workforce and services.

What we want



We want a strong and skilled eye care workforce.

We want practices to have the right equipment and technology.

This will help protect sight now and in the future.

Why this is important



More people need eye care as they get older.

Some areas struggle to recruit optometrists.

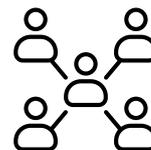
Rural areas are especially affected.

From 2028, all new optometrists in Scotland will be trained to prescribe medicines.

This means they can manage more conditions safely in the community.

Support is needed now to keep services running well..

Why it matters



- People can access eye care in their local area
- Fewer people need hospital appointments
- Better technology helps find problems earlier

Case Study: The value of OCT in community optometry_ **Overview**



A patient who had wavy and distorted visited their optometrist.

The basic eye exam didn't confirm the cause of the problem.

An OCT scan revealed epiretinal membrane (ERM) (a thin layer of scar tissue forming on the surface of the retina) that can blur and distort vision.

The patient had surgery to reduce the vision problems and improve their quality of life.

Without OCT, the cause may have gone undetected, delaying diagnosis and treatment.

OCT allowed the optometrist to find and treat the problem.

Case shared by an OS member, NHS GG&C.

What is needed



-
- A national plan for the optical workforce
 - Support for rural and hard-to-reach areas
 - Investment in equipment and digital systems
 - Support for new ways of working.

How this will happen



Optometry professionals are committed to training and learning.

They invest in new technology.

With the right support, they can continue to deliver high-quality care.

Our call to action



Optometry Scotland wants to work with all political parties.

By supporting these priorities, parties can:

- Protect people's sight
- Reduce pressure on hospitals
- Keep eye care free at the point of use
- Support fair and local NHS services

Why this is important

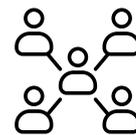


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Why it matters



-
- Shorten waiting times
 - Better use of hospital services
 - Care closer to home

About Optometry Scotland



Optometry Scotland represents optometrists and dispensing opticians in Scotland.

Our members provide NHS-funded eye care in communities across the country.

Each year, they carry out more than 2.4 million NHS-funded eye examinations.

These examinations help prevent sight loss and support the NHS.

References



1 Public Health Scotland. Ophthalmic Workload Statistics: Year ending, 31 March 2025.

Available at: <https://publichealthscotland.scot>

2 General Optical Council. Public Perceptions Research 2025. Available at:

<https://optical.org>

3 Scottish Government. Equality Impact Assessment: Community Glaucoma Service 2024.

Available at: <https://www.gov.scot>

4 NHS Education for Scotland. Optometry Foundation Training Year and MOptom

Independent Prescribing Updates. Available at: <https://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk>

End Page Information

Endorsements



This manifesto is endorsed by the following organisations:

- Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO)
- Association of Optometrists (AOP)
- FODO Scotland (The Association of Eye Care Providers)
- The College of Optometrists

Optometry Scotland Information

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