

Joint Statement from NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership and Optometry Wales

29/05/2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wales Pioneers Eye Care Reform: Optometrists Can Now Certify Vision Impairment for All Conditions

In a first across the UK, Wales will allow optometrists to officially certify Vision Impairment for all types of eye conditions. This major change is expected to improve support for people with sight loss and reduce the pressure on busy hospital eye departments.

Until now, only hospital-based ophthalmologists could certify all vision impairment. Following a successful change in May 2023 where optometrists could certify for one condition, now from 11th June 2025, optometrists in Wales will certify vision impairment for all conditions in adults, giving patients faster access to help.

Improving Access to Care

Optometrists can now assess and certify vision impairment not just in optometry practices (often known as opticians) on the high street, but also in patients' homes. This means people will get the support they need more quickly and without the long delays that often occur when waiting for a referral to a hospital. This new approach follows NICE guidelines and ensures that people with vision loss are supported in a timely and efficient way.

A Team Effort with Wales Leading the Way

This change in how eye care services are delivered was the result of collaboration between Welsh Government, NHS Wales, optometrists, and ophthalmologists, with support from the voluntary sector representing the patient's voice. The goal is to make the process easier and faster for patients.

Judy Misra, CEO of Optometry Wales, said:

"This is a big step forward for patients in Wales. By allowing optometrists to handle more certification, we can reduce delays and free up hospital resources for patients with more complex needs."

Optometrists can now certify a wider range of conditions, not just age-related macular degeneration, addressing a gap in care and helping to manage the demand for services.

However, children and patients who are receiving treatments to improve their vision will still be assessed in hospitals.

Dedication of the Optometry Profession

This change wouldn't have been possible without the dedication and innovation of optometrists in Wales. They've demonstrated flexibility and a forward-thinking approach in providing better care for patients.

Rebecca John, National Clinical Lead for Wales General Ophthalmic Services, said:

"We're proud of the optometry profession in Wales. This is another example of how they are leading the way in primary care, thinking outside the box and showing their importance to the modern NHS."

Setting the Standard for the Future

Wales is setting a new standard for how eye care services can work together seamlessly, focusing on the needs of the patient. The expansion of this service will be supported by extra training for optometrists and close collaboration with local authorities.

This reform isn't just about improving the process—it's about a shift in how eye care is designed and delivered for the future.

Owen Williams, Wales Council of the Blind Director, shared that he is "delighted":

"More patients with sight loss can now be issued a Certificate of Vision Impairment on the high street or in the comfort of their own home. It's all about getting patients more quickly connected to additional support in the community. This might be a self-help group; emotional support; fitness and wellbeing opportunities; or help with staying in employment. There are many ways a patient can be helped beyond medical interventions, and we see the optometrist as a key figure in the process of socially prescribing and referring to other organisations, as well as providing access to additional support, welfare benefits, financial concessions and services in social care."

ENDS

For media enquiries, please contact:

WGOS National Clinical Lead, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

Email: gswclinical.lead@wales.nhs.uk

Optometry Wales

Email: Judy.Misra@optometrywales.com

Notes to editors:

- Certification of Vision Impairment (CVI) is the formal process through which patients with significant sight loss are registered for access to rehabilitation, social care, and financial support services.
- The reform applies to all pathologies and was developed in collaboration with the Welsh Government, NHS Wales, the College of Optometrists, and clinical leaders in ophthalmology.
- NICE guidelines emphasise the importance of timely certification to reduce the impact of sight loss and improve quality of life.
- Evidence shows unmet need in Wales for certification which this service change seeks to address.
- NHS Wales is the public funded National Health Service of Wales providing healthcare to some 3 million people who live in the country. The Welsh Government sets the Health

Care strategy and NHS in Wales delivers that strategy and services via the seven Local Health Boards, three NHS Trusts and two Special Health Authorities. The NHS has a key principle which is that - Good healthcare should be available to all.

- NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership is an independent mutual organisation, owned and directed by NHS Wales. It provides a range of high quality, customer-focused professional, technical and administrative services on behalf of all Health Boards and Trusts in NHS Wales.
- Optometry Wales (OW) is the umbrella professional body for all community optometrists, dispensing opticians and optometric practices in Wales. OW's main function is to represent the profession at all levels in Wales including negotiating in respect of national NHS services provided by optometry in primary care.
- Wales Council of the Blind (WCB) is the independent umbrella agency for vision impairment in Wales representing blind and partially sighted people and the clubs and societies who support them. Its independence enables it to act as an impartial observer, advocate, intermediary and evaluator for this complex, diverse group of organisations and services. WCB puts the voices of people with lived experience at the centre of what it does, reporting on their views to the people who are responsible for the services that help them. WCB also acts as an agency to direct people to these services, giving them impartial advice and choice.

References:

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2. John R, Williams G, Morgan T, George MR, Reynolds R, Acton JH. The unmet need for certification of vision impairment for people accessing a national primary care-based low vision rehabilitation service. Ophthalmic Physiol Opt. 2025 Jan;45(1):308-314. doi: 10.1111/opo.13413.
3. Welsh Government. Welsh Health Circular: Certification of Vision Impairment in Primary and Community Care (WHC/2023/10): Welsh Government; 2023. [Available from: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2023-07/certificate-of-visual-impairment-in-primary-and-community-care.pdf>]