

# Access to Low Vision Services (England)

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## What we think

Access to low vision services are vital for children and adults whose daily life is affected by visual impairment. Provision of appropriate low vision services helps enable people to maintain independence, maximise the use of their residual vision and thereby improve quality of life, reduces the risk of falls, isolation and improves mental wellbeing.

It is essential that low vision services are provided locally, free of charge, by appropriately qualified professionals in all areas of England. Provision of low vision services should not be delayed until a person is certified as visually impaired but rather provided as soon as an individual will benefit.

## Background information

Low vision services include assessment of low vision needs, provision of low vision aids free of charge on a long term loan basis based on identified need, training on the use of these aids and referral to further help and support, particularly rehabilitation services.

Recent research from the USA indicates that vision-related quality-of-life scores increased significantly after people had comprehensive vision rehabilitation [1].

## What's happening now

Provision of low vision services varies considerably across England. Some areas have a comprehensive service based in a hospital or in the community while in other areas services do not exist or are being cut leaving people without support. This “postcode lottery” of provision is unacceptable.

## **What should happen**

Low vision services should be provided consistently in all areas of England in line with the Clinical Council for Eye Health Commissioning's (CCEHC) 'Low Vision, Habilitation and Rehabilitation Framework for Children and Adults' (July 2017)[2]. Access to low vision services should not be dependent on certification of visual impairment but rather on the ability to benefit from provision of service. There is evidence (ref) that people are better able to use low vision aids if they are able to access them as soon as they would benefit rather than waiting until the person is certified as visually impaired.

There need to be a variety of routes through which people can access low vision services, including self-referral, referral from local sight loss societies, high street optometrists, GPs, as well as hospital eye services. The referral routes need to be clear and well publicised. All services, wherever they are provided must be offered free of charge to the individual with low vision, the equipment is often provided on a free long term loan basis.

## **What RNIB are doing**

RNIB will campaign nationally, working with people with low vision and eye health sector stakeholders, to secure statutory recognition of the right to low vision services for all those who would benefit.

Locally Networks and Regional Campaign Officers are working with partners to defend against cuts to low vision services.

RNIB is commissioned to provide a comprehensive low vision service to Camden and Islington residents. This is a beacon practice that provides training in the provision of multi-disciplinary working in low vision. It is an approach that achieves the recommendations of the CCEHC low vision framework.

## **Contact**

For further information please contact Helen Lee, RNIB Policy and Campaigns Manager, [helen.lee@rnib.org.uk](mailto:helen.lee@rnib.org.uk)

This policy is due for review on February 2020.

## **References**

[1] Selivanova A, Fenwick E, Man R, Seiple W, Jackson ML, (2019) Outcomes After Comprehensive Vision Rehabilitation Using Vision-related Quality of Life Questionnaires: Impact of Vision Impairment and

National Eye Institute Visual Functioning Questionnaire. *Optom Vis Sci*, 96 (2): 87-94

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30589760>

[2] Clinical Council for Eye Health Commissioning's (July 2017, revised February 2018) Low Vision, Habilitation and Rehabilitation Framework for Children and Adults

<https://www.college-optometrists.org/the-college/ccehc/planning-commissioning.html>