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## **Government prioritises eye health and the fight against preventable sight loss**

The optical bodies have commended government for making the first ever national commitment to tackle preventable sight loss.

*Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Improving outcomes and supporting transparency*, published today, sets the national public health priorities for England and includes a measure of eye health. The indicator will measure the number of people losing their sight from the three main causes of preventable sight loss: glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and diabetic retinopathy. Without action it is estimated that there will be 2.45 million people living with sight loss in the UK by 2020 and 4 million by 2050. Half of all sight loss is preventable.

Speaking on behalf of Optical Confederation, David Hewlett said, "We have been stressing the priority of eye health through the UK Vision Strategy Partnership for some years now as well as highlighting the vital role that the nation's optometrists and dispensing opticians play, with hospital colleagues, in improving sight and preventing visual impairment through early detection and treatment. This indicator will provide the focus that has previously been missing for NHS commissioners and Joint Health and Wellbeing Boards to work together, and with us, to tackle these public health challenges. The government is to be congratulated for recognising that the current levels of avoidable blindness are not acceptable and for taking action to tackle them."

Dr Cindy Tromans, President of the College of Optometrists which recently brought eye care bodies together to publish *An optical sector strategy to improve ophthalmic public health*, also welcomed the Government's decision. Dr Tromans said, "The Government has set us all a great new challenge. Working together with the NHS and local authorities, optometrists can make today's announcement a real turning point in the fight against preventable sight loss."

As part of the *Optical sector strategy*, the Local Optical Committee Support Unit is working with all stakeholders to develop an Ophthalmic Public Health Network for launch later this Spring. The virtual network will bring together all those working on or interested in ophthalmic public health including NHS commissioners, Joint Health and Wellbeing Boards, providers, public health experts and academic departments. It will encourage the sharing of expertise and innovation to improve ophthalmic health outcomes across the whole population.

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