

Stephen Kinnock MP
Minister of State for Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

4th February 2025

Dear Minister,

It was good to meet you back in the autumn and to know how much you support the role of primary eye care in rebalancing and resetting the NHS and tackling the waiting list issues. These problems have built up over the past 15 years through the imposition of cruel austerity cuts on primary care (beyond even those imposed on the hospital sector), the lack of genuine strategic planning for the NHS and the underfunding of the gatekeeper roles of primary care. Lord Darzi pointed this out in his independent review, and you have articulated it so well through the three necessary shifts: hospital to community, analogue to digital, sickness to prevention.

In this context we have seen and support the announcements you have made about strengthening the other three pillars of primary care. Normally, at this time of year, as the negotiating body for primary eye care, we would already have been invited by NHS England and DHSC to submit data and arguments to underpin sight testing funding and grants for 2025/26. Our understanding, however, is that officials and NHS England may be considering a different approach this year.

This has prompted us to write to you, as the fourth pillar of primary care, in advance of the Spending Review and subsequent allocation of DHSC and NHS resources, which we know will be tight. We need to remind you of the importance of restoring and strengthening primary eye care to address the problems of capacity and waiting times in hospital ophthalmology and pressure on our GP colleagues. Without strengthened primary eye care, people will continue to suffer avoidable sight loss due to delays in hospital eye care services, something the elective recovery plan and community hubs will not solve alone given the rate of population ageing. Need must be met, and demand managed, safely at source, not downstream or scarce NHS resources are not being used effectively.

I enclose a letter, with supporting data, we have sent to NHS England in which we request a meeting with senior officials to discuss issues before the new financial year. We very much hope you will lend your support to that and to ensuring they strengthen, support and invest fairly in primary eye care from the start of the 10 Year Health Plan to help us help you fix hospital eye care and waits by the middle of the Parliamentary term.

Yours sincerely

Paul Carroll
Chair OFNC