



Transforming eye health

PRESS RELEASE

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Eye health crisis set to deepen

ONE in five people will live with sight loss in their lifetime despite at least half of all cases being avoidableⁱ, warns a new report published by charity Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and high street opticians Specsavers.

The alarming new statistics show that every day 250 people start to lose their sight in the UK. Women, who tend to live longer, are at greater risk than men, with one in four women set to develop sight loss in their lifetime compared with one in eight menⁱⁱ.

Almost six million people in the UK currently live with sight-threatening conditions yet 25 per cent of people are not having an eye test every two yearsⁱⁱⁱ as recommended by the College of Optometrists^{iv}. The extent of the problem means that nearly every family in Britain is touched by sight problems in some way.

RNIB acting CEO Sally Harvey says: 'Our report reveals new evidence that one in five people will live with sight loss in their lifetime, so our work is now more important than ever. The eye health crisis looks set to deepen and the cost burden is destined to soar unless urgent action is taken.

'Almost 80 per cent of people living with sight loss are over the age of 64', so with an ageing population that is expected to retire later, more of our national workforce will be impacted by sight loss. Alongside rapidly growing demand for eye care services, and capacity problems in some clinics at a time of growing budget deficits, we are facing an extremely challenging time for eye health in the UK, and we must take action now.

'We will continue to press for integrated services and effective referral and treatment for local communities as a key way of tackling the capacity problems in hospital eye departments. We will champion active planning that is based on the eye health needs of local communities and we will present conclusions from our policy roundtables to a parliamentary Inquiry on eye health services.'

The State Of The Nation Eye Health 2017: A Year in Review report, launched ahead of National Eye Health Week (18 – 24 September), is an annual benchmark of Britain's eye health by RNIB and Specsavers, who joined forces in 2016 to raise awareness of the importance of eye health at every level to help prevent avoidable sight loss.

While a YouGov survey commissioned for the report suggests 1.1 million^{vi} more people took action to improve their eye health by visiting an optician since the campaign launched last September, there is much still to be done, according to Specsavers founder Doug Perkins.

An optometrist for more than 50 years, he says: 'We are calling on political leaders, senior decision makers in health and social care, and local champions to work together to ensure that people receive timely treatment to prevent avoidable sight loss.

'Without this leadership the eye health crisis will continue to worsen and patients' sight will be put increasingly at risk, deepening the economic burden that we already estimate will rise from £28 billion today if nothing is done now.'

TV presenter and journalist Anne Robinson is supporting this year's campaign as eye health ambassador. Her own family experience of eye health problems saw her Irish godfather, who had a love of horse racing, lose an eye through cancer.

Anne says: 'It was really sad - not only could he no longer watch television, but he couldn't look up the form or do all the things he usually loved to do. This needn't have happened as science has progressed so far that if he'd have been having regular eye tests he could have enjoyed those racing programmes until he died.'

Anne's father also struggled with sight loss. After years of ignoring his vision problems he decided to have his eyes tested on a family trip to London. The optician discovered that he had cataracts and referred him for surgery to remove them.

Anne adds: 'Neither of my parents went for regular eye tests. My father had been a teacher all his life until he retired so reading, as it is to all of us in our family, was terribly important. He'd missed out on reading newspapers and books. Sometimes, as you get older, you don't admit that you're struggling. Looking back, he clearly knew something was wrong. With the cataracts gone he could read comfortably again.

'I now know that all of us, from the age of three, should be having our eyes tested regularly because of what an optician can detect.'

The report also reveals that:

- Sight is the nation's most precious sense by far; 10 times more people (78 per cent of people) said sight was the sense they fear losing most compared to the next most popular sense, smell (8 per cent), followed by hearing (7 per cent)
- Almost a quarter of people are ignoring the first signs of sight loss; despite not being able to see as well in the distance or close up as they used to, 23 per cent have not sought advice from an optician or medical professional
- More than 80 per cent of people are not aware that an optician can spot the early signs of cardiovascular disease, the leading cause of death in the UK
- People put their boiler before their eye health; half of UK adults have their boiler serviced once a year, over a third renew their mobile phone contract every two years, while 50 per cent of UK adults last had their eyes tested more than a year ago or never
- Research suggests Brits check their teeth more often than their eyes; 42 per cent visit the dentist once every six months (equating to four times over two years) while 25 per cent of UK adults haven't had an eye test in the past two years or at all
- A quarter of people who spend £50 a year on shoes would not be prepared to pay anything at all for an eye test

The report, written by RNIB and Specsavers and supplemented by an independent YouGov poll of 6,430 UK adults, was unveiled at an event hosted by the partnership in London today.

The event marks a stepping up of RNIB and Specsavers transforming eye health campaign, which will include a multi-million pound investment in marketing, nationwide fundraising and a tour of the UK with their Eye Pod simulated sight loss experience to educate the nation about the importance of eye health. A list of tour locations is available below.

-Ends-

Issued by Beattie Communications on behalf of Specsavers

[specsavers.com](https://www.specsavers.com)



[specsavers official](https://www.youtube.com/specsaversofficial)



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[@specsavers](https://twitter.com/specsavers)

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Urgent enquiries out-of-hours: 07948 482812

Location	Date
Milton Keynes (City Square)	Friday 1 September
Windsor (St Leonard's Rd)	Friday 8 September
Exeter (Princesshay Square)	Monday 11 September
Cardiff (Churchill Way)	Tuesday 12 September
Southampton (above Bar Street)	Wednesday 13 September
Leeds (Albion Street)	Tuesday 19 September
Manchester (location TBC)	Thursday 21 September
Glasgow (Buchanan street)	Wednesday 27 September
Newcastle (Grainger Street)	Thursday 28 September
Chesterfield (Area on New Square)	Friday 29 September
Birmingham (Victoria Square)	Saturday 30 September

Eye Pod Tour dates

Notes to Editors

About Specsavers

- Specsavers is a partnership of almost 2,000 locally-run businesses throughout the world -all committed to delivering high quality, affordable optical and hearing care in the communities they serve.
- Each store is part-owned and managed by its own joint venture partners who are supported by key specialists in support offices
- More than 36 million customers are registered with Specsavers and the partnership had a turnover of more than £2.2bn in 2016/17
- More than one in three people who wear glasses in the UK buy them from Specsavers
- Specsavers is a champion of the National Health Service – of its 22.2m customers in the UK, fifty five per cent are from the NHS and the company is the largest provider of free NHS digital hearing aids
- Specsavers supports several UK charities and is in partnership with RNIB for a public awareness campaign to transform the nation's eye health.
- Specsavers runs a home-visiting service in the UK and Ireland called Specsavers Healthcall for those who cannot get to their local store unaccompanied.

About RNIB

- We are the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and we're here for everyone affected by sight loss – that's over 2 million people in the UK. If you, or someone you know, has a sight problem, RNIB can help.
- Call the RNIB Helpline on 0303 123 9999 or visit www.rnib.org.uk

ⁱ The State of the Nation Eye Health 2017: A Year in Review, Specsavers/RNIB

ⁱⁱ This is primarily due to the fact that women have a greater life expectancy.

ⁱⁱⁱ YouGov Survey commissioned by Specsavers and RNIB 23rd June -7th July 2017 of 6,430 UK adults aged 18+

^{iv} The State of the Nation Eye Health 2016, Specsavers/RNIB

^v The State of the Nation Eye Health 2016, Specsavers/RNIB

^{vi} YouGov Survey commissioned by Specsavers and RNIB 23rd June -7th July 2017 of 6,430 UK adults aged 18+. Specsavers calculation based on the Office of National Statistics' 2015 and 2016 UK 18+ population estimates. 2015 population estimate for those who have been for an eye test in past year = $51339161 \times 0.4567 = 23,446,594.83$. 2016 population estimate for those who have been for an eye test in past year = $51767543 \times 0.4750 = 24,589,582.93$. $24,589,582.93 - 23,446,594.83 = 1,142,988.10$