

# The State of Ireland's Eye Health 2022



# Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Contents                               | 2  |
| Summary                                | 3  |
| Acknowledgements                       | 3  |
| Foreword                               | 4  |
| Healthy eyes, happier lives            | 5  |
| A glaucoma ticking time bomb           | 8  |
| Tackling a nationwide emergency        | 10 |
| Eye care in the community              | 12 |
| The future of glaucoma care in Ireland | 15 |
| A final word                           | 17 |
| References                             | 18 |

# Summary

We rely on our eyes from the moment we wake, but it's all too easy to take them for granted until our vision is affected. Despite sight being our most valuable sense, many people don't visit their optician for regular check-ups. We all need to do more to raise awareness of why this is so vital. Glaucoma is an insidious disease. Vision can be irreparably damaged before patients experience symptoms. Routine eye tests are the best way to spot problems early. Treatment is effective and regular monitoring will identify patients at risk of sight loss. But routine eye testing was restricted during the pandemic and secondary care is struggling to cope with demand. Patients risk severe vision loss if they are not seen in a timely manner

– we are sitting on a glaucoma ticking time bomb. Although this report highlights some examples of integrated care pathways delivering high quality glaucoma care, there is so much more that can be done. Community optometry is ready to work collaboratively with the entire eye care sector to deliver shared care services that will reduce the burden on the HSE, improve clinical outcomes for patients and save sight.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Paul Carey, Bella and Rose Delaney, Paddy Weston and Liz Wilkinson for sharing their stories. Their experiences illustrate why it is so important that the pace of change in the way health care is delivered is accelerated.

Thank you to all at Fighting Blindness for sharing your expertise and the work you do to raise awareness of eye health and the need for early detection of sight-threatening conditions.

We are grateful to all of our eye health colleagues

who have contributed their expertise to this report.

Eye care in Ireland has begun to change and by working collaboratively we have the opportunity to do so much more.



**Report author**  
**Dr Philippa Simkiss**

# Foreword



**Anna Moran,**  
**Chief Executive (interim)**  
**Fighting Blindness**

Fighting Blindness is a patient-led charity with a vision to cure blindness, support people living with sight loss and empower patients. We advocate for equity of access to timely and appropriate diagnosis, healthcare, therapies and support services. We are continually active in the areas of education and information provision. We are delighted that Specsavers has partnered with us to provide a definitive state-of-the-nation report focused on glaucoma – the leading cause of sight loss globally.

We remain deeply concerned about the lasting impact of coronavirus on people with, and at risk of, sight loss. Throughout the pandemic, so many of us concerned with eye health have worked hard to provide urgent care and support to those who have needed it. There is now a move towards getting back to in-person meetings and consultations – but there is a backlog that the specialist hospitals are struggling to meet.

Community optometry was required to severely restrict services, causing a reduction in referrals to hospital. Almost all routine testing in hospital eye services stopped as they dealt with emergency and urgent cases only. This significant backlog was compounded due to widespread reluctance and inability to attend eye appointments while the Covid-19 risk was greatest.

While many people will not have been disadvantaged by this delay, some may now need urgent sight-saving treatment. Some will have permanent vision loss. We are deeply and sincerely grateful to everyone in community optometry for providing patients safe access to important eye tests and health care – and that this has provided a lifeline for those needing urgent care. Glaucoma is a silent destroyer; irreparable damage can be caused before symptoms become apparent to the patient. This report highlights the scale of the challenge we now face with glaucoma – and the continuing need for regular eye tests. Everyone at Fighting Blindness is ready to play our part in preventing avoidable sight loss.



# Healthy eyes, happier lives

**Dr Pixie McKenna, broadcaster and author, explains why looking after our eyes can also help our physical and mental health.**

Our eyes are tremendously powerful, yet incredibly intricate. Your iris (the coloured part of your eye) has 256 unique characteristics while your fingerprint has just 40. Retinal scanners, which use infrared light to map the unique pattern of blood vessels on the retina, are used increasingly for identification purposes, such as in airport immigration. [1,2].

We rely on our eyes all the time, but it's all too easy to take them for granted until our vision is affected. Despite sight being our most valuable sense [3] many people don't visit their optician for regular check-ups [4]. Perhaps the fear of losing our sight pushes the thought to the back of our minds – but eye problems are very common.

One in five of us will live with sight loss during our lifetime [5].

Today, 14% of the 4.9 million people in Ireland are aged 65 and older, and this is set to increase to 20% of the population by 2030 [6,7].

With more than 54,000 people already blind or visually impaired, the impact of vision loss will grow substantially in the future [8] because older people are at higher risk of sight-threatening conditions, such as cataracts, diabetic eye disease, glaucoma and macular degeneration.

We know that we can visit our optician for a prescription for glasses or contact lenses. Did you know that a wide range of other eye conditions and vision problems can be picked up by eye routine tests? Some sight-threatening conditions, like glaucoma, can present with no symptoms, so only ➤

half of those affected are even aware that they have the condition [9]. That's why it is vital that everyone gets their eyes tested regularly. Early detection and treatment is the best way to protect your eyes from vision loss.

Our eyes are a window on our wider health and wellbeing. Early symptoms of diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, rheumatoid arthritis, some kinds of cancer and dementia can be detected during an eye test [10,11]. The latest research is exploring how an eye examination can predict our risk of having a heart attack [12].

## World class eye care in Ireland

Community optometrists at your local practice are amongst the most highly qualified in the field in the world. In the Republic of Ireland a qualified optometrist achieves a Bachelor of Science degree from Technological University Dublin and is regulated as a health care professional under CORU and the Health and Social Care Professions Office (HSCP) Act of 2017. They work closely with other healthcare professionals to deliver safe and effective eye care services to people of all ages and levels of

vision, playing a vital role in preventing sight loss. Many community optical practices have a range of hospital grade equipment, including advanced OCT (Optical Coherence Tomography) scanners, which can spot sight-threatening conditions like glaucoma up to four years earlier than traditional methods [13], well before you notice something is wrong.

## Vision and mental wellbeing

It's not surprising that vision is closely linked to our mental wellbeing. Research shows that problems with our vision are ➤

### Bella Rose's story

## 'She truly is a brave girl'

Dean Delaney noticed that his daughter, Bella Rose, aged 12, was experiencing persistent and severe headaches. He booked an appointment at his local optical practice. Optometrist, Daibheid McHugh, gave Bella Rose a thorough eye examination with an OCT (Optical Coherence Tomography) scan to show the retina's distinctive layers and the optic nerve, which

carries signals between the eye and the brain. Daibheid identified swelling on the optic nerves – a sign of papilloedema – usually caused by an increase in pressure around the brain. He made an urgent referral to hospital, where Bella Rose was seen immediately and diagnosed with a brain tumour. After surgery to remove the tumour Bella Rose is on her way to a full



recovery. Dean now stresses the importance of eye tests and Daibheid says, 'Bella Rose's case was severe and complex. Had she not come into the practice for a sight test, things may have proved even more serious for her. She truly is a brave girl.'

associated with loneliness, social isolation, anxiety, fear, depression and thoughts of suicide [14].

Why not follow these tips to give your eyes, your health, and your wellbeing the attention they deserve?

### **Eat Well and stay active**

We've all heard that carrots can help us see in the dark and there is some truth behind it. Eating a healthy diet is good for your eyes. For example, leafy green vegetables and nuts have lots of health benefits and can help protect against a range of eye conditions. Regular exercise can help reduce your risk of conditions caused by being overweight, such as type 2 diabetes.

### **Stop smoking**

Smoking is bad for your lungs and bad for your sight. It can triple your chance of developing age-related macular degeneration, a leading cause of severe vision loss.

### **Get regular eye tests**

It's important to get regular eye tests. Most patients are entitled to a eye test free of charge through the public health service every two years.

An optometrist can offer care that best suits you and your lifestyle and they can spot any problems early.

For people age 60 and older, the Irish College of Ophthalmologists recommends having a comprehensive eye exam every one to two years, or as directed by your GP, optometrist or eye doctor [15]

### **Wear sunglasses**

Protect your eyes from the sun by wearing sunglasses with UV protection. Look for glasses carrying the CE mark, or standard marks IS EN ISO 12312-1:2013, to be sure that they match up to the appropriate safety standards.

### **Know your family history**

Some eye conditions, such as glaucoma, are hereditary and some, such as Retinitis Pigmentosa, also known as RP, are genetic conditions and can be inherited. It is

really important to have regular eye tests if you have a family history of glaucoma and, if someone in the family develops problems with their retinas, make sure you tell your optician.

### **Avoid DIY eye beauty treatments**

Attempting DIY eye beauty treatments can be risky as you may cause some damage to your eyes. It's best to leave lash lifts, eyelash and eyebrow tinting and brow waxing to the professionals.

### **Screen savers**

To avoid eye strain if we spend hours in front of screens, it's important to follow the 20/20/20 rule. Give your eyes a well-earned break every 20 minutes by looking at least 20 feet away for 20 seconds.

# A glaucoma ticking time bomb

Ophthalmology **is one of the busiest** outpatient specialties in the HSE and has the **longest waiting lists** in the country [16].

## Huge backlog

**38,511**



people were waiting for HSE ophthalmology appointments in August 2022 [17].

## **+12 months**

In June 2022, more than 19,000 people had been waiting longer than one year [18].

## Glaucoma is the leading cause of irreversible blindness worldwide

Yet many people don't know they have it [19]. As many as half of all cases are undiagnosed [20].

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases which damage the optic nerve, usually due to changes in pressure inside the eye (ocular hypertension). Typically, there are no symptoms to begin with as glaucoma develops slowly, affecting the periphery of your vision first. This means that some people may not realise that they have glaucoma, and it's often only picked up during a routine eye test.



Glaucoma accounts for more than 20% of outpatient appointments in hospital eye care [21].

If glaucoma is in the family, close relatives can be up to ten times more likely to develop it [22].

**People of African origin** are more at risk of developing glaucoma and of **developing it at a younger age** [23].

John Weldon, President of Optometry Ireland, has warned that 'Citizens' **eye health is being compromised** due to ongoing and **unacceptable delays**' [24] – quote in Irish news 20 Sept 2021 – when the waiting list was 49,000.

## Rising costs

**€21 billion**

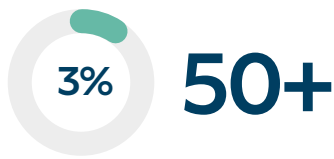
Ireland's population health cost in 2022 is €21 billion [25].

**€2.67 billion**

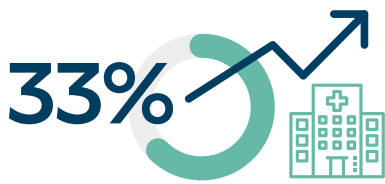
the estimated annual cost of sight loss and blindness before the pandemic [26].

The backlog of eye care services caused by the pandemic is likely to impose significant additional costs for people with sight-threatening conditions as they live with a greater risk of falls, fear of (further) vision loss, productivity losses and reduced quality of life while waiting.

## Increase in demand



An estimated 3% of people over 50 in Ireland has glaucoma, and Ireland's population, currently 5m [27] is growing.



the demand for glaucoma services is expected to rise by 33% in the coming decade [28].

**Most glaucoma is picked up through routine eye tests, but these were restricted during the pandemic**

There is no general population screening programme for glaucoma [29]. Case finding through regular eye tests for early detection, followed by careful observation and regular treatment, can usually minimise loss of vision. But eye care was reduced or restricted in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

123,700



Although services remained open for urgent care, the number of eye tests in 2020 fell by 123,700, a 19% decline compared to tests delivered in 2019 [30].

## Paul's story

## 'Paul's field of vision was severely restricted'

Paul Carey, aged 66, had not been experiencing any symptoms and had no obvious risk factors or family history of glaucoma. He visited his local optician as he wanted to arrange repair of his broken glasses.



While there he took the opportunity to have an eye test as it had been more than two years since his last one. His optometrist carried out a thorough eye examination and noted Paul's field of vision was severely restricted.

The high level of the pressure behind Paul's eyes was also a cause for concern and glaucoma was suspected. He was advised to go to the hospital eye department

immediately. The diagnosis was confirmed, and Paul has begun treatment.

He explains, 'I had no idea what was happening behind my eyes. A routine test has given me a chance to swiftly access medical care. I highly recommend regular eye tests for everyone. My optometrist told me glaucoma is a silent thief of sight, and I could not agree more.'

The fall in eye tests resulted in large reductions in referrals from primary care to hospitals.

In his 2022 Waiting List Action Plan, Minister for Health,

Stephen Donnelley, highlights the large number of people who stayed away from health services during the pandemic and recognises that when they come forward it will result in huge additional demand [31].

# Tackling a nationwide emergency

In the past 12 months Specsavers has



Tested more than  
**1.1 million** eyes



Captured more than  
**300,000** OCT scans

‘The numbers above show just how well-equipped optometry is to play a huge part of the solution to the eye care problems we now face in Ireland and will do in the future, and they don’t include the many thousands

of referrals made overall, from routine cataract referrals to urgent retinal and macular issues. Optometrists are a fundamental part of the eye health network and can do so much more to help. Optometry practices are well equipped with the

diagnostic technology to detect eye disease, and with the right infrastructure, primary care optometrists could potentially manage some patients in the community.’



**Owen Blee,**  
Optometry Director,  
Specsavers Ireland

Fighting Blindness has seen a significant increase in requests for our services as we emerge from the pandemic. The organisation doubled the number of support groups facilitated since the commencement of Covid-19 restrictions and the transition from face-to-face meetings to online through a variety of platforms. This began with required Zoom training for new and existing service users – quite a challenge for many living with sight loss.

We noticed early on that there was an upsurge in mental health issue-related requests among people with a range of eye conditions; and last year, despite the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, there was a 30% increase in requests for counselling services. Many in our community rely on touch to navigate, and this was coupled with certain difficulties in maintaining social distancing. This manifested in a general reluctance to travel – especially to hospital appointments – fearing infection.

Forums such as the Fighting Blindness zoom coffee morning and mindfulness group have offered members an opportunity to maintain established friendships and develop new relationships. Isolation has a negative impact on mental health.

## Liz's story

# 'I'd encourage everyone to get their eyes tested regularly'



Liz Wilkinson has attended her local optical practice regularly since 2014 – she has an eye test every two years. In December 2018, Liz felt unwell and was experiencing heavy, sore eyes. As she had recently started wearing some new glasses, Liz thought this might be the cause, so she booked an appointment with her optometrist.

Alana Moore carried out a thorough eye examination and found Liz's intra-ocular pressure to be raised at R 32mmHg and L 26mmHg. Alana referred Liz to an ophthalmologist who, after consultation and initial treatment, diagnosed OHT (Ocular Hypertension). In March 2022, Liz underwent laser surgery to relieve the pressure and now requires one daily eye drop. Liz says, 'I'm so glad my OHT was picked up in the early stages. Often there are no symptoms, so I'd encourage everyone to get their eyes tested regularly'.

Several of our support groups did not exist prior to the pandemic and have developed in response to changes in the needs of our community; these include the Young Adults, Parents and Partners Support Groups.

There is significant anxiety in the community regarding the length of ophthalmology waiting lists, exacerbated by Covid-19, and the potential resulting disease progression

in the absence of treatment. We receive weekly queries from patients looking for information on potential new therapies and clinical trials for various eye diseases. These are often triggered by a news story in the media. People naturally seek certainty – for many they just hope that their sight does not deteriorate further.



**Dr Ellen Moran,**  
Research Manager  
Fighting Blindness



# Eye care in the community

## Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has integrated provision for the diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of glaucoma patients underpinned by effective collaboration between optometrists and ophthalmologists. The Belfast Trust has a dedicated glaucoma clinic, which acts as a 'one stop shop', offering all diagnostic and monitoring tests during a single appointment. At the height of the coronavirus pandemic, the glaucoma clinic developed a highly innovative approach to care with the creation of a drive through clinic, which enabled the continued care of high-risk patients. Throughout the pandemic, primary care optometrists managing acute

optometric presentations had increased communication with ophthalmology. This helped to further strengthen relationships between the professions.

Primary care optometrists with additional glaucoma qualifications triage glaucoma referrals. This helps to reduce the burden of inappropriate referrals in secondary care and ensures those who need consultant-led care can access it in a timely fashion. From 2019, approximately 1,300 OHT patients, in line with NICE guidelines, have been discharged into the care of optometrists in the community. These optometrists have additional qualifications and participate in the ECHO (Extension of Community Healthcare

Outcomes) network. This network is a pioneering tele-mentoring programme through which optometrists and ophthalmologists meet virtually for case presentations, peer review and continuing professional development.

Throughout Northern Ireland 55 practices provide this OHT service, allowing patients to receive timely, convenient, appropriate care within their local community. Patients are discharged to community optometry with an individual care plan, which optometrists work within. Optometrists are supported by an electronic referral for advice system, which gives direct access to a consultant ophthalmologist who can review findings and issue appropriate advice for patient management. 'Our OHT Scheme recognises the ability of suitably qualified optometrists to competently manage the care of OHT patients. This good practise is underpinned by regular multidisciplinary peer review meetings as we build continuing professional development into our governance.'



**Angela Knox,**  
Ocular hypertension  
(OHT) consultant  
ophthalmic surgeon and  
clinical lead for glaucoma  
services

'The OHT scheme is an example of true collaborative working, which is constantly evolving to deliver excellent patient care closer to their homes. I am proud of the role community optometry is playing to meet local need.'

A review of the service is underway. We hope that, in line with NICE guideline NG81, an optometrist will be able to liaise with ophthalmology and the patient's GP to take forward any action in respect of treatment for OHT and initial prescribing of medication if required.'



**Jill Campbell, Chair of Optometry Northern Ireland**

## Ireland

The HSE's Enhanced Community Care (ECC) programme aims to enhance and increase community health services. ECC is a €240 million investment in community health services that is part of the Sláintecare programme. The key goal is to ease pressure on Ireland's acute hospitals by providing community access to specialist services, close to home. To achieve this the

programme promotes the integration of primary and community care services to meet population health needs throughout Ireland, to reduce dependence on hospital services and provide access to consultant-led specialist services in the community [32].

Reform to make the delivery of glaucoma care in the community more consistent has already begun.

**In response to the Covid-19 pandemic** a team from the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital (RVEEH) adopted an idea from Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and set up a temporary drive-through clinic [33]. Patients were able to drive to the clinic to receive an eye pressure check. Medical records

were sent electronically to the consultant-led team at the hospital for review and decisions about treatment and follow-up. The approach proved to be fast and efficient; more than 650 patients were seen between August 2020 to July 2021. RVEEH is in the process of migrating all hospital records onto the electronic record system used in the drive-through clinic and the aim is to use it in new primary eye care centres.

**Delegates at the Irish College of Ophthalmologists (ICO)** recent symposium considered the need for new clinical pathways and



the transition of stable glaucoma care to the community [34]. Learning from the drive-through clinic has been extended to other areas to deliver care to people with glaucoma closer to home. The ICO also discussed the implementation of community-based Integrated Eye Care Teams, which will draw on the skills of ophthalmic nurses, orthoptists, optometrists and ophthalmic technicians. These teams will see most patients and only those who require complex care will be referred to hospital [35].

**At a recent meeting of the Oireachtas Health Committee,** Professor David Keegan, consultant ophthalmologist, advised that systems which share the workload between hospitals and community specialists, could prevent more people from unnecessarily losing their vision or going blind [36].

## Paddy's story

# 'I'm so glad that I paid a visit to my optician'

When Paddy Weston explained his headaches and blurred vision to his optometrist, Martin O'Brien, he had no idea that he was in danger of losing his sight. Martin noted Paddy had developed visual field loss in the superior field of both eyes. Aware this could be caused by damage to the visual pathway in the brain, Martin suspected that Paddy had experienced a stroke and made an urgent referral to the local A&E department. Paddy was taken straight to ICU, where he spent three days and a further day on a stroke ward.

Good communication between Martin and health care staff at the hospital enabled them to work together to support Paddy, whose condition was deemed as critical. He lost 25% of his vision in both eyes and is now on medication, which he must take for the rest of his life. Despite this serious prognosis, Paddy is thankful: 'I'm so glad that I paid a visit to my optician and I'm particularly grateful to Martin - without his skill and knowledge I wouldn't have accessed hospital care so swiftly.'



**Above:** A student at the Department of Optometry at Technological University Dublin

# The future of glaucoma care in Ireland

## Developing tomorrow's experts

The Department of Optometry at Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) is the only provider of education and training to optometrists in the Republic of Ireland. It offers experiential learning and clinical practice at the university's purpose-built clinical training facility, the National Optometry Centre.

'The National Optometry Centre at TU Dublin is equipped to the highest

standard with modern diagnostic technology and provides exceptional patient care across the full range of eye and vision care services. We serve students and eyecare professionals throughout Ireland and the sector as a whole. The university also has a world-leading, dedicated eye and vision science research centre, Centre for Eye Research Ireland, which aims to become a leader in blindness prevention internationally.

Resource in healthcare post-COVID is a huge challenge.

TU Dublin optometry graduates are well positioned to contribute their expertise as new models of eye care develop. Many enter community practice and they are already equipped to deliver high quality glaucoma care.'



**Declan Hovenden,**  
Assistant Head of  
the School of Clinical  
and Optometric Sciences,  
Technological University  
Dublin

As part of a shared commitment to the future talent for optometry, Specsavers Ireland recently announced an academic partnership with TU Dublin, providing expert mentorship and work placements to optometry students. Specsavers optometrists will also present regular guest lectures, providing an insight into the professional world of optometry.

## Shaping the solution

'Our models of glaucoma care have begun to change in the light of increasing demand, driven by the growth and the increasingly ageing population in Ireland. Traditionally glaucoma patients were treated in part in the community by medical ophthalmologists but mostly in the acute hospital setting. More and more these large hospital centres deal with those cases at the more complex end of the spectrum of glaucoma care, often end stage requiring more complex intervention such as surgery.

In recent years moves have been made to change the paradigm of care for the more routine cases in that they can be seen in the community. The Irish College of Ophthalmologists has worked extensively with the HSE and with the Department of Health to develop significant workforce and resource planning and supports the implementation of the new Integrated Eye Care Teams (IECT) which will extend the delivery of specialist ophthalmic care in a non-acute setting. During the last 3-4 years, approximately ten of these new units have been approved around the country. These will be operated by the 'IECTs', which

consist of a team led by a consultant ophthalmologist, and includes optometrists, orthoptists, and nursing and administrative staff. In the glaucoma setting the optometrist will be working within these shared care services carrying out roles, such as intraocular pressure measurement, imaging and visual field testing. Over time these IECT optometrists will develop their decision-making skills and extend their practice further.

The recent introduction of Optical Coherence Topography (OCT) scanners into community optical practices gives optometrists the technology to spot changes early. Involvement of community optometrists in the co-management of patients with less severe disease is something that can be looked at in the future. We will continue to exchange ideas with colleagues in other jurisdictions, such as our nearest neighbours in Northern Ireland through the All Ireland Glaucoma Group' as we consider future opportunities.'



**Jeremy O'Connor,**  
consultant  
ophthalmologist

'There is a state plan to move care into the community. Optical practices and optometrists have a huge role to play in the design

and delivery of shared care in the community. We are working collaboratively with all sector partners to make eye care an integral part of population and public health. This will help prevent sight loss due to delays in care. Optometrists are clinically trained and technically equipped to deliver a wider range of services to patients. We will continue to promote the role of the primary care workforce and highlight the need for infrastructure and funding to deliver world-class primary eye care services in Ireland.'



**Garvan Mulligan,**  
Chair of FODO  
Ireland

In response to the eye care waiting list figures, published in August 2021, John Weldon, President of Optometry Ireland said, 'Much of the resources needed to increase capacity in eye care, are already in place in optometry. There are 300 practices and 700 practitioners throughout the country who are highly trained, have state-of-the-art equipment and have capacity to provide more services. There is an opportunity to address waiting lists in eye care through greater use of optometrists.' [37]

# A final word

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, models of eye care in Ireland had begun to change. However, hospital ophthalmology services remain under tremendous pressure and many patients are still experiencing long waiting times and delayed follow-up appointments. As this report shows, delayed treatment for glaucoma can result in unnecessary vision loss. It is clear we need more capacity to meet current and future demand for eye care.

Glaucoma is an insidious disease because vision can be irreparably damaged before patients experience symptoms. Yet it is the most preventable cause of blindness in Ireland, provided early detection and treatment is in place. Prevention must be a priority for us all and together we need to reach millions of people with important messages about looking after their eyes. One of the best ways to detect glaucoma is during a routine eye test – that's why it's so important to have one regularly. For those with confirmed glaucoma, regular monitoring is crucial, yet



**Kerril Hickey, Chairman of Specsavers Ireland**

challenges to capacity mean that appointments are often delayed.

Eye care professionals agree that we need to reduce the number of patients who need to be seen in hospitals by managing less complex cases in the community. Community optical practices already play an important role in eye care pathways and are well-placed to be part of the solution. Optometrists detect eye disease, including glaucoma, and filter patients into secondary care. In a constant drive to improve patient care, optical practices in the community have already invested in state-of-the-art technology and

communications equipment. Community optometrists are well prepared to manage people with stable glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration closer to home, measuring their interocular pressure and monitoring their eye health. This could take a huge burden away from secondary care, enabling ophthalmologists to focus on patients requiring more complex care. People who currently can't access eye care in their community would receive care without the need to travel long distances to hospital.

Resource in healthcare is a huge challenge. There are 700 optometrists spread throughout Ireland with the space, technology and skill to deliver high quality eye care and the capacity to manage patients with stable glaucoma in the community.

We are ready to work collaboratively with the entire eye care sector to deliver shared care services that will reduce the burden on our HSE, improve clinical outcomes for patients, and save sight.

# References

- [1] Cofta, P., Furnell, S. (2008). Use of Biometric Data. Understanding Public Perceptions: Trust and Engagement in ICT-mediated Services. International Engineering Consortium. p. 153. ISBN 9781931695954.
- [2] What are the limits of human vision? Adam Hadhazy. 27 July 2015. BBC Future <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20150727-what-are-the-limits-of-human-vision>
- [3] Enoch, J. et al. (2019). Evaluating Whether Sight Is the Most Valued Sense. *JAMA ophthalmology*, 137(11), 1317–1320. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamaophthalmol.2019.3537>
- [4] Specsavers commissioned Empathy Research to undertake an omnibus survey of over 1,000 people in September 2021 of to support Specsavers' State of Ireland's Eye Health Report 2021
- [5] RNIB. (2021). Key statistics about sight loss. <https://www.rnib.org.uk/health-social-care-and-education-professionals/knowledge-and-research-hub/research-reports/general-research/key-statistics-about-sight-loss>
- [6] Central Statistics Office. Population and Migration Estimates. April 2021. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2021/mainresults/>
- [7] Government of Ireland. Pensions Commission. July 2021. Population and Labour Force Projections Technical Sub-Committee – Working Paper 1
- [8] NCBI. Facts about Sight Loss. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/facts-about-sightloss/> accessed September 2022.
- [9] Soh, Z. et al. (2021). The Global Extent of Undetected Glaucoma in Adults: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *Ophthalmology*, 128(10), 1393–1404. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ophtha.2021.04.009>
- [10] Schaneman, J. et al. (2010). The role of comprehensive eye exams in the early detection of diabetes and other chronic diseases in an employed population. *Population health management*, 13(4), 195–199. <https://doi.org/10.1089/pop.2009.0050>
- [11] Chiquita, S. et al. (2019). The Retina as a Window or Mirror of the Brain Changes Detected in Alzheimer's Disease: Critical Aspects to Unravel. *Molecular neurobiology*, 56(8), 5416–5435. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12035-018-1461-6>
- [12] Villaplana Velasco A. (2022). Abstract C22.6: Decreased retinal vascular complexity is an early biomarker of myocardial infarction supported by a shared genetic control. Abstract presented at the Annual conference of the European Society of Human Genetics, in Vienna, Austria.
- [13] Kuang, T. M. et al. (2015). Estimating Lead Time Gained by Optical Coherence Tomography in Detecting Glaucoma before Development of Visual Field Defects. *Ophthalmology*, 122(10), 2002–2009. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ophtha.2015.06.015>
- [14] Lundeen, E. A. et al. (2022). Self-Reported Vision Impairment and Psychological Distress in U.S. Adults. *Ophthalmic epidemiology*, 29(2), 171–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09286586.2021.1918177>
- [15] Irish College of Ophthalmologists. (2021). Early Detection Key in Prevention of Glaucoma-Related Sight Loss. March. <https://www.eyedoctors.ie/press-release/March-7-2021/Early-Detection-Key-in-Prevention-of-Glaucoma-Related-Sight-Loss/92.html>
- [16] Committee on Health. (2022). Joint Committee on Health. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/press-centre/press-releases/20220712-joint-committee-on-health-to-meet-for-discussion-on-integrated-eye-care/>
- [17] National Treatment Purchase Fund. National waiting list data. [https://www.ntpf.ie/home/inpatient\\_group.htm](https://www.ntpf.ie/home/inpatient_group.htm) accessed September 2022
- [18] Independent.ie. (2022). Optometrists say Government is not implementing its own plan as waiting list grows to more than 20,000. 06 June
- [19] Optometrists say Government is not implementing its own plan as waiting list grows to more than 20,000 - Independent.ie
- [20] National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). (2020). Glaucoma patients most at risk of sight loss. <https://evidence.nihr.ac.uk/alert/glaucoma-patients-most-at-risk-of-sight-loss-were-identified-in-a-new-study/>
- [21] Soh, Z. et al. (2021). The Global Extent of Undetected Glaucoma in Adults: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *Ophthalmology*, 128(10), 1393–1404. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ophtha.2021.04.009>
- [22] Irish College of Ophthalmologists. (2022). ICO News Summer: Delivering Integrated Care in Ireland Symposium [https://www.eyedoctors.ie/medium/files/ICO\\_NEWS\\_31\\_Sp22\\_web.pdf](https://www.eyedoctors.ie/medium/files/ICO_NEWS_31_Sp22_web.pdf)
- [23] Okeke C. (2016). Familial Glaucoma Risk: Spreading the Word. *Review of Ophthalmology*, July
- [24] Irish College of Ophthalmologists. (2021). Early Detection Key in Prevention of Glaucoma-Related Sight Loss. March. <https://www.eyedoctors.ie/press-release/March-7-2021/Early-Detection-Key-in-Prevention-of-Glaucoma-Related-Sight-Loss/92.html>
- [25] Independent.ie. (2021). 'Unacceptable' delays as 49,000 are on waiting list for eye care. 20 September. (Waiting list was 49,000) <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/health/unacceptable-delays-as-49000-are-on-waiting-list-for-eye-care-40868816.html>
- [26] Department of Health. (2021). Budget 2022: Minister Donnelly announces €21 billion, the biggest ever investment in Ireland's health and social care services. 21 October. <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/9c7a3-budget-2022-minister-donnelly-announces-21billion-the-biggest-ever-investment-in-irelands-health-and-social-care-services/>
- [27] Deloitte Access Economics. (2011). The economic impact of vision impairment and blindness in the Republic of Ireland.
- [28] Irish College of Ophthalmologists. (2021). Early Detection Key in Prevention of Glaucoma-Related Sight Loss. March. <https://www.eyedoctors.ie/press-release/March-7-2021/Early-Detection-Key-in-Prevention-of-Glaucoma-Related-Sight-Loss/92.html>
- [29] Irish College of Ophthalmologists. (2021). Early Detection Key in Prevention of Glaucoma-Related Sight Loss. March. <https://www.eyedoctors.ie/press-release/March-7-2021/Early-Detection-Key-in-Prevention-of-Glaucoma-Related-Sight-Loss/92.html>
- [30] Okeke C. (2016). Familial Glaucoma Risk: Spreading the Word. *Review of Ophthalmology*, July. <https://www.reviewofophthalmology.com/article/familial-glaucoma-risk-spreading-the-word>
- [31] Estimated from Specsavers own data
- [32] Committee on Health. (2022). Joint Committee on Health. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/press-centre/press-releases/20220712-joint-committee-on-health-to-meet-for-discussion-on-integrated-eye-care/>
- [33] Independent.ie (2022). 'Quite simply not acceptable' – Taoiseach on waiting times at hospital emergency departments. 16 June <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/health/quite-simply-not-acceptable-taoiseach-on-waiting-times-at-hospital-emergency-departments-41759457.html>
- [34] Powell, S. et al. (2022). Audit of outcomes following attendance at the City West drive-through IOP glaucoma clinic during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Irish journal of medical science*, 1–10. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11845-021-02893-9>
- [35] Irish College of Ophthalmologists. (2022). ICO News Summer: Delivering Integrated Care in Ireland Symposium [https://www.eyedoctors.ie/medium/files/ICO\\_NEWS\\_31\\_Sp22\\_web.pdf](https://www.eyedoctors.ie/medium/files/ICO_NEWS_31_Sp22_web.pdf)
- [36] Irish College of Ophthalmologists. (2022). ICO News Spring. ICO National Education Series. Integrated Eye Care Team. [https://www.eyedoctors.ie/medium/files/ICO%20News%2030\\_spr2022.pdf](https://www.eyedoctors.ie/medium/files/ICO%20News%2030_spr2022.pdf)
- [37] Independent.ie. (2022). Long wait lists for eye care could be cut if hospitals and community specialists share the workload, committee told. 14 July. <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/health/long-wait-lists-for-eye-care-could-be-cut-if-hospitals-and-community-specialists-share-the-workload-committee-told-41838405.html>
- [38] Independent.ie. (2021). 'Unacceptable' delays as 49,000 are on waiting list for eye care. 20 September. (Waiting list was 49,000) <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/health/unacceptable-delays-as-49000-are-on-waiting-list-for-eye-care-40868816.html>



# Further Information

**Fighting Blindness Ireland**

**Website:** [www.fightingblindness.ie/](http://www.fightingblindness.ie/)



The State of Ireland's Eye Health 2022 report highlights the lasting impact of the coronavirus pandemic on eye health. Routine eye testing was restricted during the pandemic and secondary care is struggling to cope with demand. Glaucoma is an insidious disease. Vision can be irreparably damaged before patients experience symptoms - we are sitting on a glaucoma ticking time bomb. We must draw on the professional expertise of the entire eye care sector to improve glaucoma care to help save sight.

This report is available to download from:  
[www.specsavers.ie/reports/eye-health/state-of-irelands-eye-health-2022](http://www.specsavers.ie/reports/eye-health/state-of-irelands-eye-health-2022)