



# **Community Optometry:** **A Sustainable Solution for Eye Care**

**OPTOMETRY SCOTLAND MANIFESTO 2026**

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## Foreword

I am proud to present Optometry Scotland's manifesto for the 2026 Scottish Parliament election.

Every day, community optometrists and dispensing opticians provide trusted care in towns, cities and rural communities across Scotland. We are privileged to play a vital role in protecting the nation's sight and supporting the NHS.

This manifesto reflects the collective voice of our members. It sets out how, with continued partnership and investment, optometry can contribute even more to Scotland's health and wellbeing.

We look forward to working with all political parties to ensure that patients continue to benefit from world-leading community eye care for years to come.



**Eilidh Thomson**  
Chair of Optometry Scotland



optometry**scotland**

# Community optometry: protecting sight, supporting the NHS

Community eye care is one of Scotland's greatest NHS success stories. Through General Ophthalmic Services (GOS), **over 2.44 million NHS-funded eye examinations were delivered in 2024/25<sup>1</sup>**. Scotland is the only UK nation with universal access to funded eye care and public trust is high: **53% of people in Scotland would go to an optometrist first for an eye problem**, compared to 36% across the UK<sup>2</sup>.

With sustained commitment, Scotland can continue to lead the UK in disease prevention, fairness and local access, reducing hospital pressures and protecting sight for generations to come.

Ahead of the 2026 Scottish Parliament election, we call on all political parties to commit to three priorities that will protect sight, prevent blindness and secure the future of Scotland's world-leading eye care system.





## Priority one: Protect sight. Prevent blindness. Deliver universal access.

### What we're calling for

We ask all political parties to safeguard and further Scotland's world-leading model of NHS-funded eye care through General Ophthalmic Services (GOS). We urge parties to reaffirm their commitment to this unique model and protect the right to accessible, preventative care through a modern and sustainable GOS framework.

### Why change is needed

GOS is the foundation of Scotland's community eye care. It ensures optometrists can detect disease early, reduce preventable sight loss and manage care safely and locally. Without sustained support, the system risks falling behind clinical and demographic needs, putting further pressure on hospitals and widening health inequalities. But with the right commitment, Scotland can continue to lead the UK in preventative eye health.

For government, GOS is a proven NHS success story, one that delivers fairness and equity of access, reduces unnecessary referrals and supports the wider prevention agenda.

### Why it matters

- Prevent avoidable blindness through early detection.
- Reduce pressure on hospital eye departments.
- Ensure accessible eyecare in every community, urban and rural.

*" At a routine NHS eye exam, my optometrist picked up signs of high blood pressure in my eyes. On measuring it, he tentatively confirmed this. My GP diagnosed primary hypertension, noting it is a 'silent killer'. Thanks to that exam, I'm now healthy and on treatment. That test could have been lifesaving."*

Kevin Kealy, patient, NHS Lothian

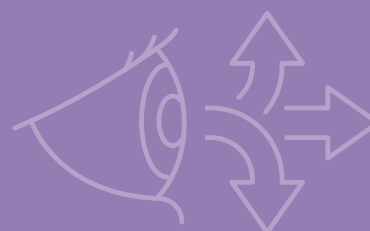


### What's needed

- Maintain fair and sustainable GOS funding.
- Review and modernise the framework in line with clinical innovation.
- Promote public uptake of NHS-funded eye examinations.

### How we'll deliver

Optometry Scotland (OS) members will continue to deliver high-quality care in community settings, raise awareness of NHS-funded services, and partner in prevention and service redesign, with the capacity to do even more if supported.



## Priority two: Shift the balance of care. Invest in local, enhanced services.

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### What we're calling for

We ask all political parties to support the expansion of optometry-led services that reduce hospital pressure and provide timely care closer to home. Scotland must scale up enhanced community services delivering the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

### Why change is needed

Optometrists already manage chronic and acute eye conditions in the community through services like the Community Glaucoma Service (CGS), the GOS Specialist Supplementary Service (GOS SS) and in some health boards, a Low Vision Service. These proven models are safe, effective and welcomed by patients, but rollout is slow.

For government, enhanced community eye care is a ready-made solution to ease NHS pressures. It shortens waiting times, reduces deterioration in vision by treating earlier, and uses existing technology and workforce more effectively. With shared access to health records, Scotland can go even further in delivering joined-up, preventative care.

*The CGS, launched in 2023, has the potential to allow 20,000 stable glaucoma patients to be safely discharged from hospital into community optometry care, easing pressure on secondary care while improving access locally.<sup>3</sup>*

### Why it matters

- Shorten waiting times and free up hospital capacity for complex cases.
- Prevent avoidable deterioration by treating conditions earlier.
- Provide faster, more convenient local access for patients.

### CASE STUDY: Community Glaucoma Service

Following excellent care from the hospital eye service, my transfer into the Community Glaucoma Service went very smoothly. It has been of an equally high standard and very supportive. Appointments offer greater flexibility than hospital services. My optician explains everything clearly, and any concerns between appointments are dealt with quickly. I am pleased with this transition into community-based care.

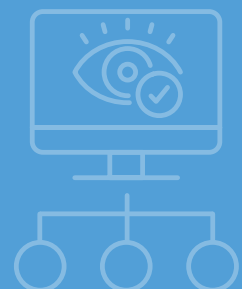
Margaret Rebsch, CGS Patient, Greater Glasgow and Clyde

### What's needed

- Expand enhanced community services by utilising the full optical workforce to deliver CGS, GOS SS, Community Low Vision Service (CLVS) and post op care.
- Create clear discharge pathways supported by shared patient records.
- Leverage existing technology, including advanced imaging such as OCT, digital referrals and remote monitoring.

### How we'll deliver

Our members are ready to deliver more care locally. With investment in training and technology, they can expand enhanced services, demonstrate impact, improve access for patients, and support NHS recovery through innovation and collaboration.



## Priority three: Secure the future workforce and infrastructure.



### What we're calling for

We ask all political parties to support a sustainable, skilled and well-equipped community based optical profession by building a future-proof workforce and infrastructure that will protect sight for generations to come.



### Why change is needed

Scotland has led the UK in universal access to NHS-funded community eye care. Optometrists here are upskilling at higher rates than elsewhere in the UK, managing complex conditions and preventing avoidable sight loss. But this success is one we cannot take for granted. Recruitment is difficult in rural areas, working patterns are changing, the workforce is ageing, and practices need investment in equipment and digital infrastructure.

*From 2028, all new optometrists in Scotland will graduate as Independent Prescribers (IP), creating a workforce trained to deliver advanced community care from day one. This will future-proof the system, but investment is required now to retain and support the profession.<sup>4</sup>*

For government, this is a proven NHS asset. Community optometry delivers over two million funded exams each year, detecting eye disease and systemic conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure. Sustaining this workforce is not a future challenge, it is a present necessity.



### Why it matters

- Ensure timely access to safe, local eye care in every community.
- Empower IP optometrists to manage more complex conditions by expanding community capacity, reducing reliance on hospitals.
- Expanding access to technology such as optical coherence tomography (OCT) to support earlier detection, better monitoring and improved patient outcomes.
- Future-proof services to meet rising demand and maintain Scotland's leadership in community eye care.



### CASE STUDY: The value of OCT in community optometry

A patient noticed their vision becoming wavy and distorted in one eye. Standard tests showed nothing unusual, but an OCT scan revealed an epiretinal membrane (ERM) – a thin layer of scar tissue forming on the surface of the retina that can blur and distort vision. With this knowledge, they underwent successful surgery, which reduced distortion and improved their quality of life.

Without OCT, the cause may have gone undetected, delaying diagnosis and treatment. OCT provided clarity, ensured timely treatment and delivered a better outcome.

Case shared by an OS member, NHS GG&C.



### What's needed

- Develop a national optical workforce strategy for community practice beyond 2025, with investment in education, training and professional development.
- Support recruitment and retention in rural and underserved areas through targeted incentives.
- Invest in infrastructure and digital integration, from OCT and referral systems to wider IT capacity.
- Support innovation, collaboration and adoption of new technologies to improve care and outcomes.



### How we'll deliver

OS members are committed to developing the next generation of clinicians and eye care professionals, investing in innovation and continuing to deliver trusted, high-quality patient care. And they are ready to do even more with the right support and infrastructure.



# Our call to action

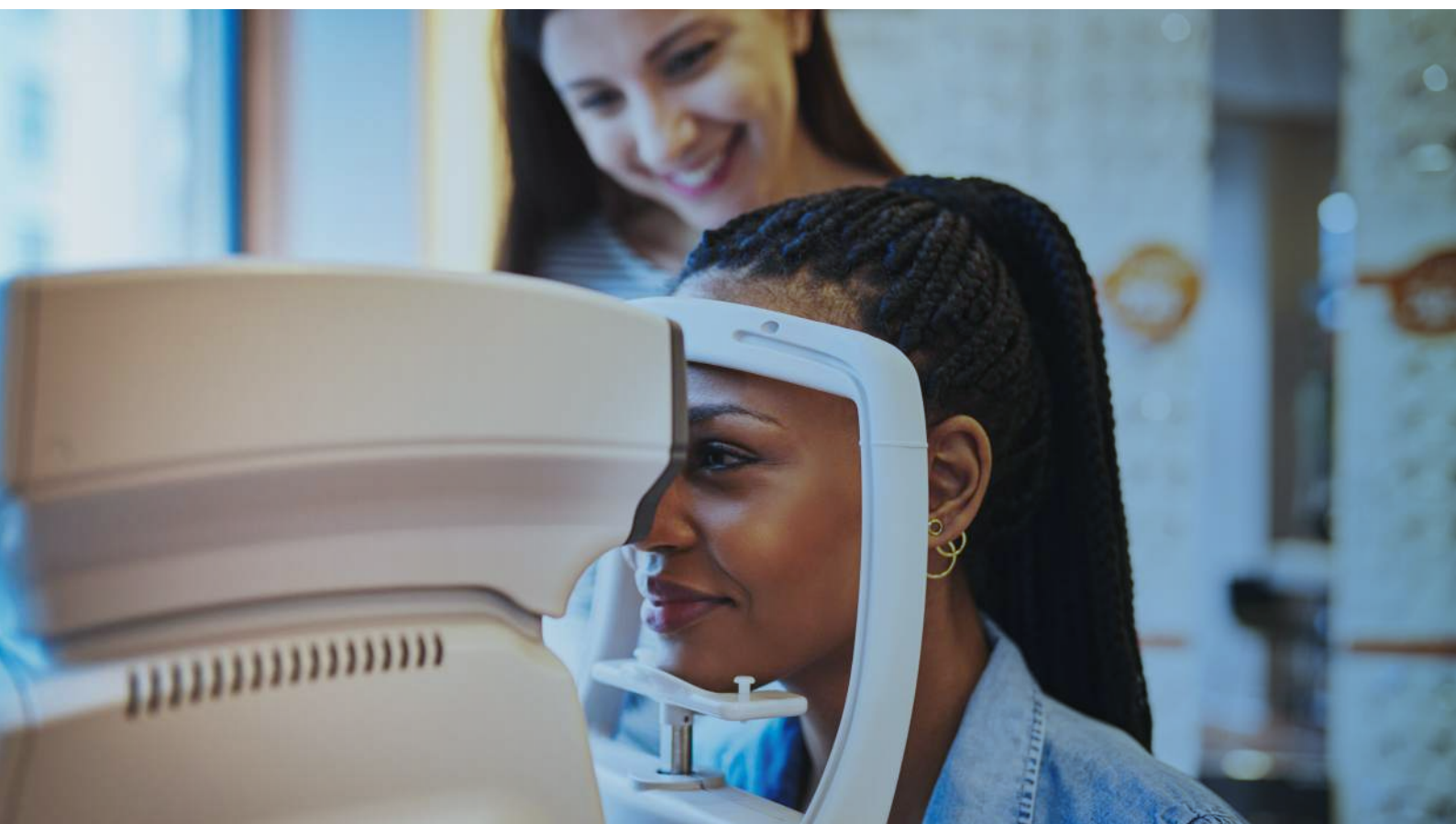
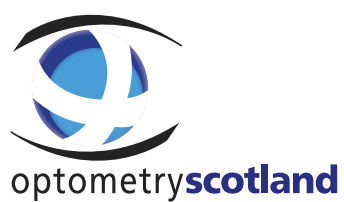
OS is ready to work with all parties to protect sight, reduce hospital pressures and maintain universal access to world-leading eye care. By making these commitments in their 2026 manifestos, political parties can secure Scotland's place as a leader in prevention, equity, fairness and innovation in community health.

## About Optometry Scotland

OS is the representative body for the country's 1,200 optometrists and dispensing opticians providing NHS-funded eye care services. We negotiate with the Scottish Government on fees and services, lobby for sustainable and innovative eye care and support our members to deliver high-quality, accessible NHS care in every community. Each year, our members provide more than 2.4 million NHS-funded eye examinations, preventing avoidable sight loss and easing pressure on hospital eye services.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Public Health Scotland. *Ophthalmic Workload Statistics: Year ending 31 March 2025*. Available at: <https://publichealthscotland.scot>
- <sup>2</sup> General Optical Council. *Public Perceptions Research 2025*. Available at: <https://optical.org>
- <sup>3</sup> Scottish Government. *Equality Impact Assessment: Community Glaucoma Service 2024*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot>
- <sup>4</sup> NHS Education for Scotland. *Optometry Foundation Training Year and MOptom Independent Prescribing Updates*. Available at: <https://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk>



This manifesto has been endorsed by:



Association of British  
Dispensing Opticians



Association of  
Optometrists



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OPTOMETRISTS

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