



THE COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRISTS

The College of Optometrists

42 Craven Street
London
WC2N 5NG
020 7839 6000
college-optometrists.org
@CollegeOptomUK

8 July 2024

Wes Streeting MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to congratulate you on your appointment as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and I would like to offer the support of The College of Optometrists in addressing some of the key challenges the NHS faces in delivering eye care services.

The College of Optometrists is the professional body for optometrists in the UK. The College qualifies the profession and delivers the guidance, development and training to ensure optometrists provide the best possible care to their patients. The College represents over 17,500 members, including almost 12,000 fully qualified optometrists in the UK who are registered with the General Optical Council (GOC).

I was delighted when in January this year Labour outlined its plans to support improved eye care services, and a commitment to cutting waiting lists across the healthcare landscape. I was particularly encouraged by plans aimed at improving eye care services, such as negotiating a deal with high street optometrists to deliver NHS outpatient appointments.

I was further encouraged that the Labour Party Manifesto offered a commitment to allow healthcare professionals, such as opticians [optometrists] to make direct referrals to specialist services or tests, as well as expanding self-referral routes where appropriate.

As you may know, there are over 600,000 people on NHS waiting lists to begin ophthalmology treatment in England, making it one of the largest contributors to the NHS backlog. Optometrists have an essential role to play to help cut NHS waiting times and improve patient outcomes.

Our manifesto for change sets out our key priorities for tackling the eye care crisis in England. Together we can end the eye care crisis and prevent sight loss if we take action to:

1. enable optometrists to provide more care to patients closer to home
2. prioritise a better-connected NHS and unlocking the potential of new technologies
3. support the optometry workforce to develop specialised skills.

We look forward to working with you and your team to make this a reality, and ensure patients receive the eye care they need in the right place and at the right time.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Gillian Rudduck MCOptom
President
The College of Optometrists