

Sight on equity:

Understanding the barriers faced by black and Asian minoritised communities when accessing sight tests

People with black and Asian heritage are at increased risk of developing conditions such as glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy. Despite this, engagement with preventative eye care is lower among these communities. National research suggests that eye health is often not prioritised due to a lack of cultural sensitivity and relevance.

We sought to understand the barriers facing Surrey's communities specifically, and what could realistically be done locally to improve access.

What did we do?



Over **200** people contributed to this research; **141** people spoke to us at in-person focus groups and community engagement events, and **98** people completed our survey. The people we spoke to reflected the ethnic, age and geographic diversity of Surrey's black and Asian communities, with specific sessions tailored to needs identified by individual communities.

The project was supported by a team of external stakeholders who ensure clinical accuracy and offer cultural, language and system insight.



At each event we shared the importance of regular sight tests and what to expect during one and offered to book appointments at local high street opticians. **19** people booked routine sight test appointments, and **6** signposting referrals were made to specialist services in the course of the project. Almost a third (**29%**) of people who completed our survey said that they would go for a sight test as a result of taking part, though some community leaders predicted the actual number to be higher.

Key findings

Not everyone is having a regular sight test

There is clear disparity in how often people from Surrey's black and Asian communities have sight tests, with some not having them as regularly as recommended. There is also a reliance on opticians to instigate appointment booking, with people waiting to be invited for a first or follow-up appointment.

"I'm not sure how regularly I go; I go when they tell me."

Woking resident, 80 – 89 year old Asian British man

Motivators and barriers

We identified the following barriers:

- **Sight tests seen as reactive not preventative**
- **Lack of awareness of the link between sight tests, eye health and general health**
- **Cost**
- **Language**
- **Language translation, cultural awareness and reasonable adjustments not met.**

Though many people had been for a sight test within the last two years, this was usually prompted by deteriorating vision. Some didn't start testing until around age 40; preventative eye health (and the link between sight tests, eye health and general health) was neither widely understood nor prioritised. Cost and language were key barriers, as well as the fact that some cultural and accessibility needs were not being addressed.

"I am only really concerned about being able to read so would only go if I can't see the letters properly."

Woking resident, 24 – 49 year old Asian British Pakistani woman

"People won't think of coming to get their eyes tested before the age of 40. They come when their vision starts deteriorating. They won't bring their kids either unless something has been picked up by school or they know there is a problem with their sight. They will go straight to the GP for everything, including sight, and don't realise they can go straight to an optician."

Woking based optician, Asian British Pakistani (@Shifa engagement, Sheerwater)

In our report, we make several recommendations to address these barriers. This includes the provision of information on the importance of routine sight tests, care pathways and the role of the optician within the healthcare landscape. Ideally, this should be **developed with an independent VCSE organisation specialising in community engagement to listen to the views of residents**. We also recommend improved signposting to translation rights and services.

Awareness of NHS entitlements

We identified widespread uncertainty about NHS entitlements. Although some people understood the criteria, others held misconceptions and focus group discussions revealed further confusion. When asked whether clearer understanding of eligibility would influence their decision to have a sight test, half of respondents said that it would, indicating that improved awareness could meaningfully increase uptake.

We call on providers and commissioners to improve information on and promotion of eligibility for free NHS sight tests and optical vouchers and signpost to organisations such as Citizen's Advice for information on benefits.

Awareness of lifestyle factors and eye health

Around half of participants said they understood how lifestyle choices affect eye health, but further discussion revealed considerable misunderstanding. When asked whether increased understanding would influence future lifestyle choices, around half said it would, highlighting the need for clearer information within black and Asian minoritised communities about how healthy lifestyle habits can help protect eye health.

The sight test experience

For those who make the decision to have a sight test the experience is generally positive; however, having translators available, flexible appointment times and more guidance and explanation would improve it.

Read the full report on our website: [Sight on equity: – March 2026](#)

Contact [Healthwatch Surrey](#) for independent advice, information and support with community engagement.