

A strain on sight: waiting for NHS specialist eye care

2.7 million people are expected to live with sight loss by 2030. Following feedback on long waits and high costs for care (and the evidence that eye care and related health issues disproportionately affect specific communities) Healthwatch England launched a national drive to learn about people's eye care experiences.

The national survey: [key findings](#)

- **Getting referred for specialist eye care can be challenging**; almost a quarter (**22%**) of those surveyed had to have multiple appointments before being referred.
- **Many people experience long waiting times for specialist eye care**; as of December 2024, one third of those waiting had been waiting more than the 18 week target set by Government
- Of those currently waiting, nearly two thirds (64%) had been **waiting more than four months** for care, while nearly one in four (**24%**) had **waited over a year**.
- Of those currently waiting for treatment, **70%** said they have noticed some **deterioration in vision**.
- Of those currently waiting **69%** said it had affected their mental health and three quarters (**75%**) said it affected their ability to continue with hobbies.
- **Few people had support while they waited or were kept up to date** by services; just **4%** said they had been given information and advice to help with day-to-day activities like working.
- There is strong public support for **optometrists to play a more significant role** in helping those needing specialist eye care.

What did we do?

- In Surrey we worked with local partners to promote the survey and to find out what local people think.
- **61** Surrey residents responded to the national survey.



"I need an eye test but my supplier is more than my work pay. Covering the difference and the admin to claim from work is a blocker to me going for a test."

Surrey resident



People in Surrey talked to us about waiting times and the impact of waiting, the cost burden of eye tests, and the issue of "upselling" (98% of the people eligible for free eye care had experienced some kind of "upselling", for things such as additional tests, more expensive frames and contact lenses).

Read more in our [Insight bulletin](#).