

## Ageing Well

# Preventable Sight Loss

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### Introduction

A person who has sight loss has difficulty in seeing which cannot be corrected using glasses or contact lenses. This is also referred to as sight or visual impairment. An optician can measure how good a person is at seeing into the distance and around them. They can use these measurements to decide if a person is sight impaired and how severe this impairment is. Once a person is certified as sight impaired then that person can choose to register their sight loss with their local council.

[The Royal National Institute of Blind People \(RNIB\)](#) estimates that there are two million people with sight loss in the UK. This includes 360,000 people who are registered blind or partially sighted. It is estimated that by 2050 the number of people with sight loss in the UK will double to four million.

Over 50% of sight loss is preventable and many people are living with sight loss that can be improved. People should, therefore, be encouraged to attend screening with an optician so that any potential sight loss can be identified and addressed.

The three major causes of preventable sight loss are age related macular degeneration (AMD), glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy.

**Age related macular degeneration (AMD)** - There are two types of Age Related Macular Degeneration (AMD) - wet and dry. Dry is the more common condition, but this develops slowly and the outcomes are less severe. Wet is the more serious condition causing severe sight loss in 10% of cases

**Glaucoma** – The eyeball contains a fluid which is constantly produced by the eye, with any excess drained through tubes. Glaucoma develops when the fluid cannot drain properly and pressure builds up, known as the intraocular pressure. Glaucoma often affects both eyes, usually to varying degrees. One eye may develop glaucoma quicker than the other.

**Diabetic retinopathy** - Diabetic Retinopathy is when high blood sugar levels cause damage to the retina and is a complication of Diabetes. If left untreated Diabetic Retinopathy can lead to blindness. Treatments such as pan-retinol laser therapy exist and can prevent sight loss. All people with diabetes are entitled to annual diabetic retinopathy screening.

### What do we know?

In 2015, there were an estimated 4,770 people living with sight loss in West Berkshire. 570 people are living with severe sight loss (blindness). By 2020 these numbers are expected to increase to 5,460 and 660 respectively. 3.0% of people living in West Berkshire are estimated to have sight loss, which compares to 3.1% of people in the UK as a whole (RNIB).

**Causes of sight loss:** The following [estimates](#) show the number of people in West Berkshire living with major causes of preventable sight loss

- 6,390 people are living with the early stages of AMD; 460 people are living with late stage dry AMD; and 950 people are living with late stage wet AMD
- 1,480 people are living with cataract and 1,510 people are living with glaucoma
- 10,060 people have diabetes and 73.3% of those who were offered it attended retinal screening in 2012/13
- 3,050 people are living with background diabetic retinopathy and 280 people are living with later stages of the disease

The figures below relate to outcomes in the [Public Health Outcomes Framework](#) for West Berkshire for the year 2014/15. There have been no significant changes since 2013/14.

Outcome	Year	Number	Per 100,000	Compared to England
4.12i - Preventable sight loss - age related macular degeneration (AMD)	2014/15	34	125.7	Similar
4.12ii - Preventable sight loss - glaucoma	2014/15	11	13.3	Similar
4.12iii - Preventable sight loss - diabetic eye disease	2013/14	5	3.8	Similar
4.12iv - Preventable sight loss - sight loss certifications	2014/15	58	37.2	Similar

Source: Public Health England, *Public Health Outcomes Framework*

**Ageing:** A European [Survey](#) found that loss of vision was the second biggest health concern of ageing, after memory loss. One in five people aged 75 and over are living with sight loss; compared to one in two aged 90 and over.

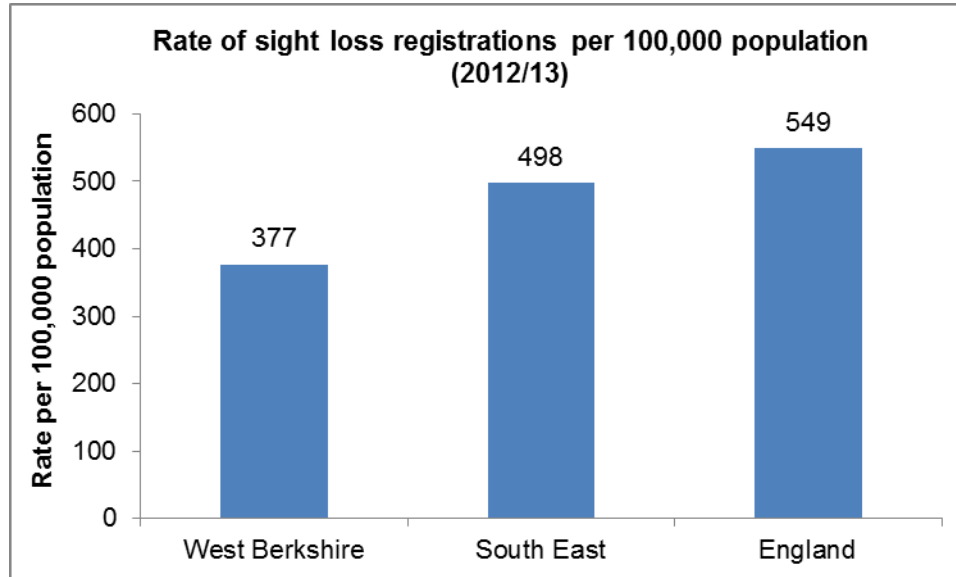
#### Older people in West Berkshire estimated to have sight loss

Age group	Number with sight loss
Aged 65 to 74	828
Aged 75 to 84	1,103
85 and over	1,255

Source: [RNIB](#)

**Sight loss registration:** In West Berkshire in 2013/14, a total of 580 people were registered as blind or partially sighted. 270 people are registered blind and 310 people are registered partially sighted.

48% of registered blind and partially sighted people are also recorded as having an additional disability.



Source: [RNIB](#)

**Spend on sight loss:** The total costs of eye care and supporting people with sight loss are difficult to establish due to the range of services and indirect costs involved. The main direct healthcare costs associated with eye care are within primary ophthalmic services, prescribing and pharmacy and within secondary care where costs are associated with outpatient services and day cases, clinics, eye casualty and inpatient services.

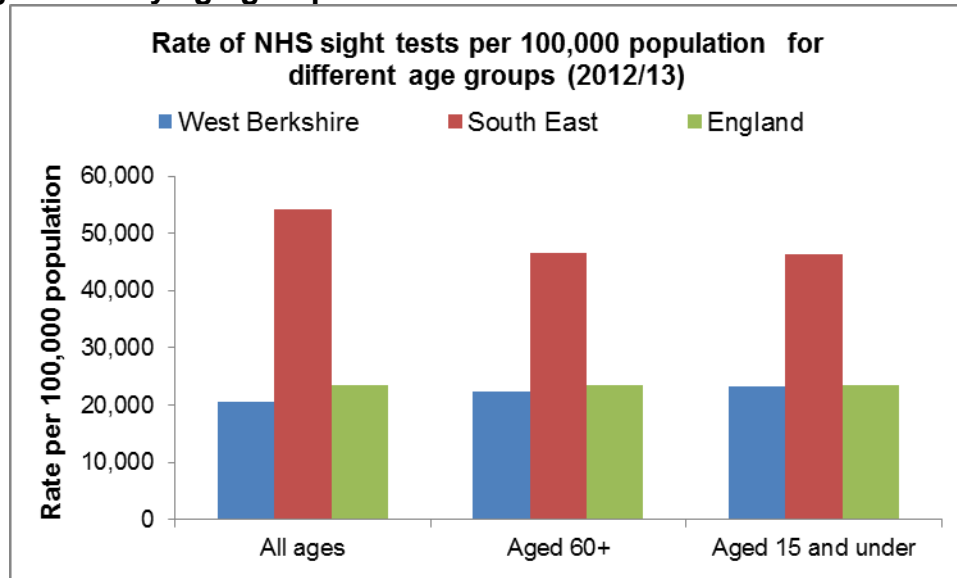
This 2014 [Newbury and District Clinical Commissioning Group](#) budget spend on problems of vision equates to £26.07 per person in West Berkshire. The 2014 North and [West Reading Clinical Commissioning Group](#) budget spend on problems on vision equates to £26.43.

The [estimated](#) indirect cost of sight loss in 2014 including the cost of family and friends providing informal care equates to £87.00 per person in West Berkshire.

Sight loss is closely linked to falls. Boyce (2011) estimates that 3.8% of falls resulting in hospital admission could be attributed to visual impairment, costing 10% of the total of treating accidental falls. Estimates from the RNIB show that there were 2,132 people (aged 65+) that experienced a fall directly attributable to sight loss in 2015 and 21 falls were severe.

**Sight testing:** The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)'s [report](#) Liberating the NHS: Eye Care, Making a reality of equity and excellence (2010) estimates that the NHS could save £2 billion through regular sight testing and early detection.

## Sight tests by age group



Source: [RNIB](#)

### What is the data telling us?

Sight loss can affect people of all ages but becomes more common with age. Older people with sight loss are also much more likely to have additional health conditions or disabilities. Sight loss impacts on a person's life in many ways including: their employment and/or education, their social life, their general wellbeing and mental health. People with a learning disability and people from black and minority ethnic groups are at a greater risk of sight loss *Source: (Action for Blind People)*. Excessive alcohol consumption and smoking have been found to significantly increase chances of developing AMD – a major cause of sight loss.

Those affected with sight loss need to be well informed about their condition and how it will affect them now and in the future. They need to be empowered and made aware of practical support available, such as visual aids, educational and psychological support, mobility training and put in contact with support networks and charities.

The provision of emotional and practical support at the right time can help people who are experiencing sight loss to retain their independence and access the support they need. A person's experience in the eye clinic is crucial. It is here that they receive their diagnosis, undergo treatment and potentially go through the process of receiving a Certificate of Vision Impairment. Equally, when someone experiences sight loss it is vital for them to have support in their homes and communities.

Screening uptake, timely treatment and early and appropriate service access are vital to improve eye health. People should be encouraged to attend regular eye screening with an optician. Those people affected by sight loss need to be well informed and empowered. This can be through the use of support networks and the provision of access, aids, and equipment.

A link exists between low income, deprivation and those living with sight loss. Three quarters of blind and partially sighted people live beyond or near the poverty line.

Blindness can often lead to social exclusion. Deprivation can be both a cause and an outcome of blindness.

### **Recommendations for consideration**

- People with visual loss reported that their greatest unmet need was for information, followed by accessibility, disability awareness and for aids and equipment. Efforts have been made within West Berkshire to target these needs along with enhanced self-assessments and specialist rehabilitation services.
- Importance in promoting sight loss prevention through increased public awareness and encouraging early detection and treatment strategies. This should be carried out in partnership with voluntary sector organisations, Clinical Commissioning Groups, GP practices and the local authority in an effort to reach the widest number of people.

### **National and local strategies**

The [UK Vision Strategy 2013-2018](#) details a framework for change and to develop services to help prevent avoidable sight loss and ensure all-round care is provided.

The strategies three key outcomes are;

- 1) Everyone in the UK looks after their eyes and their sight
- 2) Everyone with an eye condition receives timely treatment and, if permanent sight loss occurs, early and appropriate services and support are available and accessible to all
- 3) A society in which people with sight loss can fully participate

‘Seeing it my way’ is a framework from the [UK Vision Strategy 2013-2018](#) of outcomes identified as most important by blind and partially sighted people

### **Other chapters you might be interested in**

End of Life Care  
Excess Winter Deaths  
Falls and Mobility  
Mental Health (Old Age)  
Seasonal Flu

If you have any questions about this chapter, please contact Public Health and Wellbeing Team on [publichealthandwellbeing@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:publichealthandwellbeing@westberks.gov.uk) or 01635 503437