



Eye care in Suffolk

Local data from a national Healthwatch
eye care survey

healthwatch
Suffolk

About Healthwatch Suffolk

We are the health and social care champion for Suffolk.

We gather people's experiences, views and ideas about the delivery of local health and social care services and support. We work together with local leaders and decision-makers to consider people's feedback and improve standards of care. We can also help people to find information and advice about local services and support.

For more information about us, or to find feedback about local services, please visit our website (www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk).

How to Contact Us

If you have a question about Healthwatch Suffolk, our services, or this report, please contact us.

You can reach us by:

- Calling freephone 0800 448 8234
- Sending an email to info@healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk
- Using our website contact form: <https://healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/contact/>



About this data

In 2024, Healthwatch England conducted a national survey about eye care.

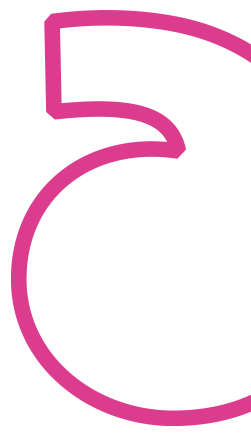
The national survey aimed to understand whether people were able to get the right help to prevent or deal with sight problems. For example:

- Are people getting their eyesight checked, and do they face any barriers?
- If people have been for an eye test or another form of eye care, what was their experience like?

This report summarises the data gathered from **33** local respondents to take a closer look at people's experiences of accessing eye care in Suffolk.



“I have been trying to get a decision about whether or not I do have glaucoma or not for a very long time; many years in fact. The tests have been delayed or not done at all, making it impossible to get a decision.”



Attending regular eye tests

An estimated 50% of sight loss is avoidable, which is why people need to get their eyesight tested regularly.

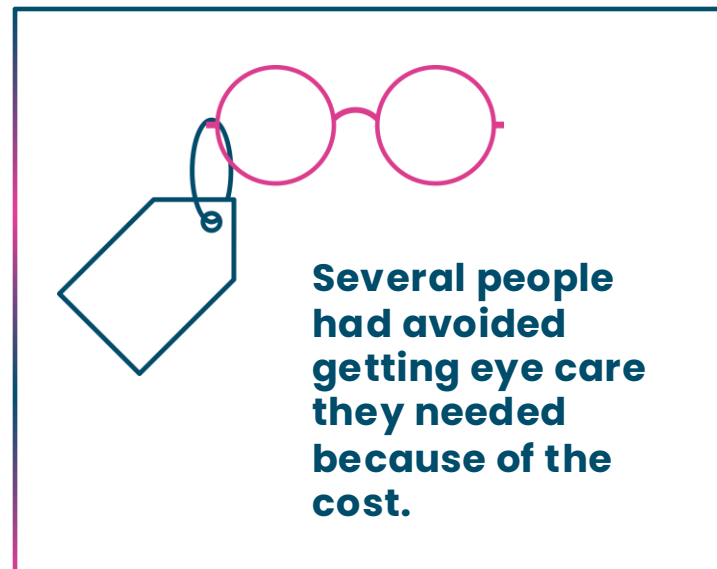
Just over 75% of Suffolk respondents said they attended regular eye tests, at least every two years. Nine of these respondents required regular eye testing, screening or monitoring for an eye condition (i.e. retinol photography).

This meant **just under 25%** did not attend eye tests as often as recommended.

At the time of responding to the survey.

Only **one** participant had not attended an opticians for an eye test within the past two years. They said they were unable to afford it and avoided it for multiple reasons. This individual was not eligible for free eye care.

When asked, **three** participants said they had avoided getting eye care they needed in the past two years because of the cost.



What did people say about visiting their optician?

Respondents provided comments about their experiences of visiting an optician, getting their eyes tested, or purchasing glasses or contact lenses.

Thirteen respondents left a comment. Most were positive (9; 69%), generally praising staff, and the care, treatment, information and advice people have received.

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- “My optician is brilliant. He puts drops in my eyes, takes x-rays and looks after me very well.”
 - “My new consultant advised me not to pay for all the bits and bobs opticians try to sell you. He said all I need is a pair of reading glasses and the cheapest frames. Good advice at last.”
 - “No problems. All very helpful and referred me to the eye clinic when necessary.”
 - “Very satisfied about the eye care I have received.”

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Two comments were mixed in sentiment. Both reflected that, although the service and treatment they received had been good, it had also been expensive.

☺☺ *"Happy with treatment as recommended but costs are becoming difficult to meet."*

☺☺ *"I receive an excellent service, but frames are expensive."*

A further two comments were negative.

One person felt staff were placing sales above the needs of customers, and the other shared an experience where they were given a product they should not have received due to a medical condition.

☹☹ *"Just wish all the so-called shop helpers were a little better with knowledge of what the customer needs instead of just thinking about sales."*

☹☹ *"Had reactolite lenses that left me unable to see outside. When I complained, [they] said I have astigmatism and shouldn't have had them."*

Experiences of Upselling

Participants were asked about their experiences of being encouraged to purchase additional services or products beyond their initial expectations.

Over half **(18; 55%)** of Suffolk respondents had experienced upselling, for one or more products or services. The graph shows the most common services and products that had been upsold:



Difficulties getting eye care

Respondents were asked whether they have experienced any difficulties getting the eye care they need from an optician or optometrist.

Six respondents said 'Yes', explaining their experiences in free-text boxes.

Three of the six comments were about waiting to access eye care services. This included difficulty getting appointments and tests being delayed.

- “I started getting gritty eyes and it took several calls to get an appointment to confirm it was 'dry eye'. **They just kept saying it wasn't yet time for my two-year appointment.**”
- “Should have had appointment with specialist at hospital. Now six months overdue. Told 'on waiting list'. Then, my GP practice tell me I should be chasing up a 'scheduled appointment'. **Been doing this for last few months. Nothing happens.**”
- “I have been trying to get a decision about whether or not I do have glaucoma or not for a very long time; many years in fact. **The tests have been delayed or not done at all, making it impossible to get a decision.**”

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Two of the six comments were about travel and access to eye care services, including difficulties accessing transport and not being able to find a service accommodating to their disability or long-term health condition.

“**After my husband died, I have found it impossible to afford to get to the hospital independently.** Hospitals transport is a joke at the moment. You can get there, but trying to get home is a problem.”

“**I was unable to find a service that would accommodate my disability** or long-term health condition.”

The final respondent shared that their needs are not met by services:

“I have Sjogrens Syndrome and am on hydroxychloroquine. After five years, I’m supposed to have specialist eye health checks done. Rheumatologist has written this in his report. However, **my optician says they don’t do these, and very few places do... no opticians, but possibly Colchester hospital? I therefore can’t have these tests done.**”

Waiting for specialist treatment

The survey specifically looked at **11 participants (33%)** who had recent experience of waiting for NHS or private treatment of an eye condition (in the past two years), to explore experiences and challenges with waiting for treatment.

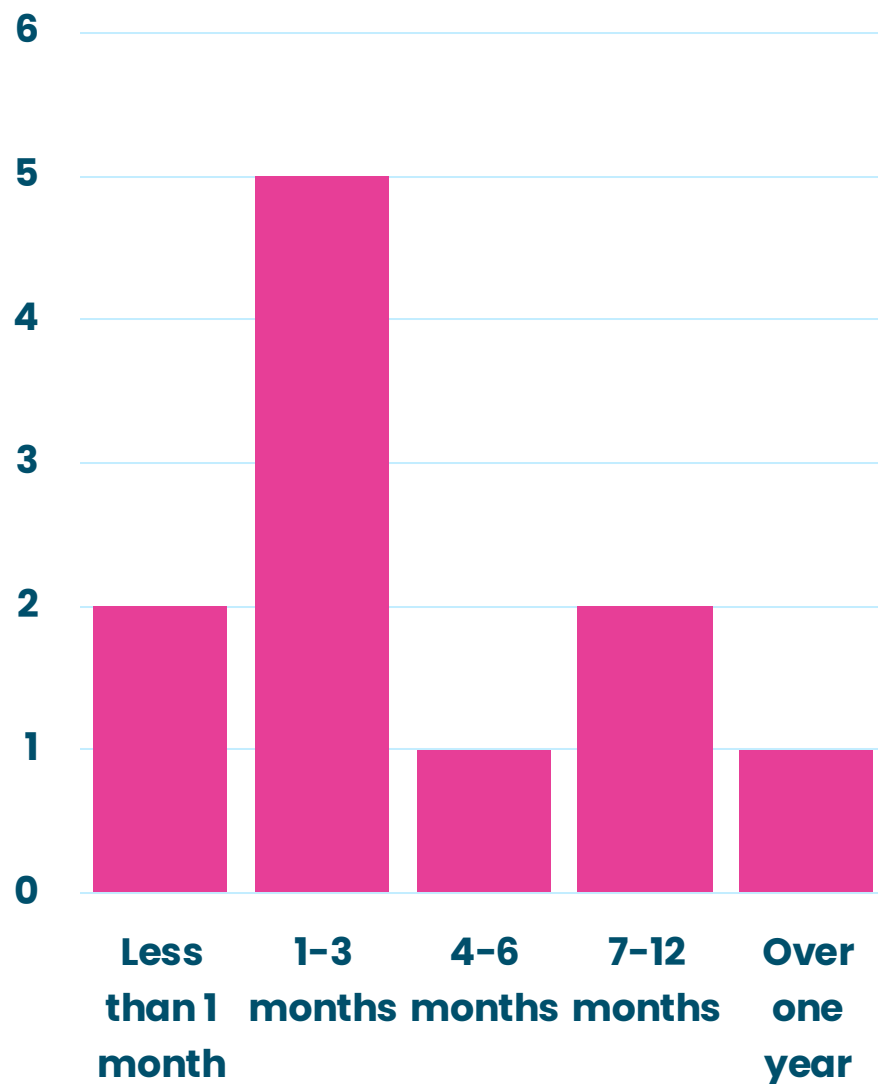
- **Three people** were currently waiting for NHS specialist treatment of an eye condition.
- **Eight people** had received either NHS or private specialist treatment of an eye condition in the past two years.
- **Six of the 11** individuals had either had, or were waiting for, treatment for cataracts. The others are unknown.
- **One person** reported using private healthcare to access the treatment.

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The graph shows how long each participant had been on the waiting list before either completing the survey (currently waiting) or being treated.

Most participants were waiting for six months or less (**7; 64%**).

However, it is worth noting that **one** participant, who has been waiting for 7-12 months, reported considerable deterioration in their vision while they waited. Others either reported some (**4**), none (**4**) or they were not sure (**2**).



Impact of waiting

Participants indicated the impacts of waiting on various aspects of their lives. The most common factors identified were their ability to continue with hobbies (9; 82%), to work (7; 64%), and an impact on their mental health and wellbeing (7; 64%). However, other areas of some participant's lives were also affected either slightly or substantially. **See the table below for a full breakdown.**

Life Aspects	Slightly impacted	Substantially impacted
Ability continue with hobbies	7	2
Ability to work	5	2
Mental health and wellbeing	6	1
Ability to live independently	3	1
Ability to socialise	4	0
Ability to exercise	3	0
Impact on relationships with partner, close friends and family	3	0
Ability to care for others	1	0

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Participants were asked whether they had been offered any type of support from the NHS whilst waiting for care or treatment.

Four people said they knew who to contact if their condition changed or if they had any questions, and one individual had been kept up-to-date about their waiting time. However, most participants either didn't know or said they were not offered any support **(6; 55%)**.

The survey also asked, 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.'

- *"I trust an optician to refer me directly to NHS specialist services or tests for any eye condition I might have, without having to see a GP first."* **The vast majority of participants strongly agreed (24; 73%). Only two individuals disagreed.**
- *"I would be comfortable going to qualified professionals working in a high street opticians for monitoring or treatment of an eye condition."* **Most participants strongly agreed (15) or agreed (8). Three participants disagreed, and one participant strongly disagreed.**

The sample

- There were 33 Suffolk respondents, including 24 women (73%) and nine men (27%).
- Most participants (30, 91%) were 60 years or over. In the UK, all individuals aged 60 and over are eligible for free eye tests under the NHS. The most common age for participants was around 65 years old.
- When asked about eligibility for free eye care, 24 (73%) were eligible. For one, this is because they were on a low income or received benefits. The remainder were 60 years or over. Some individuals who reported to be over 60 years old did not indicate if they were eligible for free eye care, which may suggest that some participants were unaware of this entitlement.
- All respondents were 'White British/English/Northern Irish/Welsh' (85%).
- Sixteen people reported having a long-term condition, eight people had a disability, and one person said they were a carer.

If you need this information in another format (such as large print or easy read), please contact us for free on 0800 448 8234, or email info@healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk.

For more information:

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