



healthwatch
Walsall

Specialist Eye Care Report

March 2025



**Engaging
Communities
Solutions**

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Introduction

Healthy vision is something many of us take for granted – until there's a problem. An estimated 50% of sight loss is avoidable. That's why people must be able to have their eyesight tested regularly and, if there is a problem, get the help they need.

Healthwatch England says *"Eye care is the busiest outpatient speciality in the NHS in England, and with an ageing population, demand is set to grow further. According to NHS statistics, of the nearly 59,000 people currently waiting for specialist eye care as of December 2024, only two thirds (66.8%) have been waiting less than the 18-week target set by Government, compared to a target of 92%."*

What we did

Healthwatch Walsall conducted a project to understand people's experiences of optometry and ophthalmology in Walsall. We asked people about their experience of eye care services in the last two years, including individuals who have in the past or are currently waiting for any specialist eye care treatment. To do this, we conducted a survey which was created by Healthwatch England. This survey was available online and in hard copy. The online version was shared through our social media channels, the Healthwatch Walsall website and added into our newsletters. The majority of our interviews were held face to face, we visited Macular eye care group at Aldridge Wellbeing Centre, Walsall Black Sisters luncheon group – Eye Care and the Ophthalmology department at Walsall Hospital.

Who took part

We spoke with 21 people from Walsall. 9 people told us they were currently waiting for specialist eye treatment and 13 people told us they had received specialist eye treatment

A demographic breakdown of participants can be found on page

Our findings

Healthwatch England reports ***"long waits for eye care are having a huge impact on people's daily lives."***

During our engagement in Walsall, we saw that waiting for specialist eye care has also had an impact on people's lives, with three-quarters of people saying their wellbeing has been affected.

38% percent of individuals awaiting specialist eye care reported that they would have opted for private treatment to receive care sooner if they could afford it. An additional **38%** were actively exploring whether they could manage the cost of private care.

Our findings have been divided into two sections.

- Currently waiting for specialist eye care
- Received specialist eye care

Each section outlines the questions presented to participants and summarises the responses received. As all questions were optional, some participants chose not to respond.

Waiting for specialist eye care

Key Findings

57% of respondents had been on the waiting list for less than a month, but 1 respondent had been waiting up to a year. Other respondents said *“no, appointments are fine but getting treatment and waiting is a nightmare.”* and *“I’m just sick of waiting.”*

During this time, **7** noticed deterioration in their vision. When it came to referrals, **4** of the respondents were sent straight to a specialist.

38% of respondents said they would have opted for private treatment if they could afford it, another **38%** were actively trying to figure out if they could afford the cost. Only a small number were in a position to pay for private care, and some said they would only do so in extreme circumstances. These responses show how delays in treatment are affecting people’s vision and how financial worries are making it even harder to get the care they need.

38% of respondents said their ability to work had not been impacted, **43%** found it harder to live on their own, and **57%** had trouble keeping up with household tasks. **63%** of respondents told us they don’t socialise as much and **50%** find it harder to enjoy activities like reading or watching TV. Waiting for specialist eye care as also affected mental health, with three-quarters of people saying their wellbeing has been affected.

Despite these challenges, support while waiting has been limited with **38%** being given updates about their waiting time or advice on managing daily life, but only **25%** had been offered mental health support or told who to contact if their condition worsened. None reported receiving any other kind of help.

Respondents told us *“I suffered mental health issues due to waiting for treatment at the time, anxiety”* and another said *“at the minute I am ok due to only having been waiting a few weeks however I am anxious about surgery and hospitals.”*

Q. What specialist eye care or treatment are you currently waiting for?

Cataracts – 3 people
Detached retina – 1 person
Cataracts both eyes – 1 person
Retinal surgery – 1 person
Glaucoma – 1 person
Eye surgery – 1 person

Q. How long have you been on a waiting list for specialist eye care?

Less than one month – 4 (57%)
1 to 3 months – 1 (14 %)
4 to 6 months – 1 (14%)
7 to 12 months – 1 (14%)

Q. Have you noticed any deterioration of your vision whilst waiting?

I have experienced some deterioration in my vision – 5 (63%)
I have experienced considerable deterioration in my vision – 2 (25%)
Don’t know – 1 (13%)

Q. How many times did you see a GP, optician, or other eye care professional before you were referred to an eye care specialist about your condition?

The first time I saw a health professional about my eye condition, I was referred directly to an eye care specialist – **4 (50%)**

The first time I saw an optician or another eye care professional about my condition, they told me to speak to my GP. My GP immediately referred me to an eye care specialist – **3 (38%)**

I had multiple appointments with my GP, optician, or another eye care professional before being referred to an eye care specialist – **1 (13%)**

Q. We'd like to ask you about your willingness to access private treatment. Please select one of the statements from the following list that best applies to your situation:

I'd have gone private for a shorter wait, but I can't afford it – **3 (38%)**

I'm looking into whether I can afford private treatment because the NHS wait is too long – **3 (38%)**

I'm considering borrowing money to access private treatment – **0**

I can afford private treatment and am arranging it – **1 (13%)**

I would only pay for private treatment in the most extreme situations – **1 (13%)**

I won't use private treatment and never would – **0**

Q. To what extent has the wait for eye care or treatment negatively impacted the following areas of your life?

Negative impact	None	Slight	Substantial
Ability to work (voluntary or paid)	3 (38%)	2 (25%)	3 (38%)
Ability to live independently	1 (14%)	3 (43%)	3 (43%)
Ability to carry out daily household tasks	1 (14%)	4 (57%)	2 (29%)
Ability to care for others	2 (25%)	3 (38%)	3 (38%)
Ability to socialise	1 (13%)	5 (63%)	2 (25%)
My ability to exercise	2 (25%)	3 (38%)	3 (38%)
My mental health and wellbeing	2 (25%)	4 (50%)	2 (25%)
Relationships with my partner, close friends, or family	5 (63%)	2 (25%)	1 (13%)
Ability to continue with hobbies (e.g. reading, watching tv, for example)	1 (13%)	3 (38%)	4 (50%)

Q. Have you been offered any of the following types of support from the NHS whilst waiting for care or treatment for your eye condition? Please select all that apply.

Mental health support – **2 (25%)**

Getting information, advice, and support to help with day-to-day activities such as employment, driving, claiming benefits, care – **3 (38%)**

Being kept up to date about your waiting time – **3 (38%)**

Knowing who to contact if your condition changes or you have any questions – **2 (25%)**

Don't know – **3 (38%)**

None of the above – **0 (0%)**

Other kind of support – **0 (0%)**

Received specialist eye care

Key findings

38% of respondents saw a significant deterioration in their vision, while another **31%** noticed some decline. **69%** of respondents told us they were referred to a specialist straight away, but others had to navigate multiple appointments before getting the help they needed.

42% of respondents said they would have opted for private treatment in order to be seen sooner but simply couldn't afford it. **31%** of respondents stated they waited for over 1 year to access specialist eye care. Respondents told us, that waiting times have caused anxiety and mental health struggles, particularly during extended periods without treatment and in anticipation of surgery and hospital visits. We did receive positive feedback regarding opticians and the NHS in general, with one respondent saying, *"I have never had an issue with healthcare or the NHS and my opticians, they have all been very good to me and have been very adapt to my needs, I have never had an issue"* and those that have told us *"the NHS is overstretched"*

60% of respondents reported at least some negative impact on their ability to work, **38%** told us they were struggling to live on their own and **68%** told us waiting for their specialist eye care had a substantial negative impact on them ability to carry out daily household tasks. **54%** found it harder to socialise and **67%** said their relationships with family or close friends had been affected. Mental health was a significant concern, with nearly **70%** reporting some level of decline.

These findings show that for many, waiting for treatment isn't just an inconvenience – it can affect their independence, wellbeing, and relationships.

We asked.

How long did you have to wait before receiving treatment from specialist eye care?

Less than 1 month – **2 (15%)**

1 to 3 months – **5 (38%)**

4 to 6 months – **2 (15%)**

7 to 12 months – **0 (0%)**

Over 1 year – **4 (31%)**

Did you experience any deterioration of your vision whilst waiting?

I have experienced a lot of deterioration in my vision – **5 (38%)**

I have experienced some deterioration in my vision – **4 (31%)**

I have not experienced deterioration in my vision – **4 (31%)**

Don't know – **0 (0%)**

Q. How many times did you see a GP, optician, or other eye care professional before you were referred to an eye care specialist about your condition?

The first time I saw a health professional about my eye condition, I was referred directly to an eye care specialist – **9 (69%)**

The first time I saw an optician or another eye care professional about my condition, they told me to speak to my GP. My GP immediately referred me to an eye care specialist – **1 (8%)**

I had multiple appointments with my GP, optician, or another eye care professional before being referred to an eye care specialist – **2 (15%)**

Other – **1 (8%)** – This respondent did not disclose the details of 'other'

Q. We'd like to ask you about your willingness to access private treatment. Please select one of the statements from the following list that best applies to your situation:

I'd have gone private for a shorter wait, but I can't afford it – **5 (42%)**

I borrowed money to access private treatment – **0**

I'm considering borrowing money to access private treatment – **0**

I could afford private treatment and decided to get it – **3 (25%)**

I didn't access private eye care, but I would consider it in the future if my condition was bad enough – **2 (17%)**

I didn't use private eye care and never would – **2 (17%)**

Q. To what extent has the wait for eye care or treatment negatively impacted the following areas of your life?

Negative impact	None	Slight	Substantial
Ability to work (voluntary or paid)	5 (38%)	6 (46%)	2 (15%)
Ability to live independently	5 (38%)	3 (23%)	5 (38%)
Ability to carry out daily household tasks	2 (17%)	2 (17%)	8 (67%)
Ability to care for others	3 (23%)	5 (38%)	5 (38%)
Ability to socialise	3 (23%)	7 (54%)	3 (23%)
My ability to exercise	2 (17%)	6 (50%)	4 (33%)
My mental health and wellbeing	4 (31%)	5 (38%)	4 (31%)
Relationships with my partner, close friends, or family	2 (17%)	8 (67%)	2 (17%)
Ability to continue with hobbies (e.g. reading, watching tv, for example)	4 (33%)	6 (50%)	2 (17%)

Q. Have you been offered any of the following types of support from the NHS whilst waiting for care or treatment for your eye condition? Please select all that apply.

Mental health support - **7 (54%)**

Getting information, advice, and support to help with day-to-day activities such as employment, driving, claiming benefits, care - **4 (31%)**

Being kept up to date about your waiting time - **1 (8%)**

Knowing who to contact if your condition changes or you have any questions - **3 (23%)**

Don't know - **0 (0%)**

None of the above - **1 (8%)**

Other kind of support - **1 (8%)**

Government Manifesto

In their manifesto, the new Labour government committed to allowing eye care professionals, such as opticians, to make direct referrals to specialist services or tests. 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.'

Strongly Agree - **8 (89%)**
Agree - **1 (11%)**
Neutral - **0 (0%)**
Disagree - **0 (0%)**
Strongly Disagree - **0 (0%)**

'I would be comfortable going to qualified professionals working in a high-street opticians for the monitoring or treatment of an eye condition.'

Strongly Agree - **4 (44%)**
Agree - **4 (44%)**
Neutral - **1 (11%)**
Disagree - **0 (0%)**
Strongly Disagree - **0 (0%)**

Conclusion

Waiting for specialist eye care.

The survey reveals how waiting for specialist eye care has impacted many aspects of daily life. While some people's ability to work remained unaffected, nearly two-thirds reported at least some negative impact. Independence was also a challenge, with **38%** struggling to live on their own and two-thirds finding household tasks more difficult.

Social lives and relationships were also affected - **54%** found it harder to socialise, and **67%** said their relationships with family or close friends had been affected. Mental health was a significant concern, with nearly **70%** reporting some level of decline.

These findings make it clear that waiting for specialist eye care isn't just frustrating—it's life-changing. For many, their vision has worsened while they wait, making it harder to work, manage their home, and even maintain relationships. Some have spent over a year trying to access treatment, and the uncertainty has taken a serious toll on their mental health, leaving them anxious and struggling to cope.

Financial barriers add to the stress, with many saying they would have gone private if they could afford it, but that simply wasn't an option. While some had a smooth referral process, others faced multiple appointments before getting the help they needed.

Despite these challenges, people still value the NHS and the care they receive from their opticians.

More support, clearer communication, and faster access to specialist care could make a huge difference for those left waiting in uncertainty.

Recommendations

- Provide mental health support or information / resources during the waiting period.
- Communicate updates to patients to reduce anxiety.
- Provide more information and advice, provide information on support with day-to-day activities such as employment, driving, claiming benefits, care.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Walsall would like to thank all the participants who took part in our survey, Macular eye care group – Aldridge wellbeing centre, Walsall Black Sisters luncheon group – eye care and the Ophthalmology department at Walsall Hospital.

Demographics

Below is a breakdown of people who took part in our survey.

Are you:

A woman - **11 (52.4%)**
A man - **10 (47.6%)**
Non-binary - **0**
Prefer to self-describe - **0**
Prefer not to say - **0**

Please tell us your age:

16 to 17 years - **0**
18 to 24 years - **0**
25 to 49 years - **3 (15%)**
50 to 64 years - **4 (20%)**
65 to 79 years - **7 (35%)**
80+ years - **6 (30%)**
Prefer not to say - **0**

Please select any of the following that apply to you:

I have a disability - **9 (50%)**
I have a long-term condition - **5 (28%)**
I am a carer - **1 (6%)**
None of the above - **3 (17%)**
I prefer not to say - **2 (11%)**

Please select your ethnicity:

Arab- **1 (5%)**
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi - **1 (5%)**
Asian/Asian British: Chinese - **1 (5%)**
Asian/Asian British: Indian - **2 (10%)**
Black/Black British: African - **1 (5%)**
Black/Black British: Caribbean - **4 (19%)**
Black/Black British: Any other Black/Black British background - **2 (10%)**
White: British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh - **5 (24%)**
White: Irish- **2 (10%)**
White: Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller - **1 (5%)**
White: Any other White background - **1 (5%)**

How would you describe your current financial situation?

Very comfortable (I have more than enough money for living expenses and a lot spare to save or spend on extras or leisure) - **7 (33%)**

Quite comfortable (I have enough money for living expenses and a little spare to save or spend on extras or leisure) - **3 (14%)**

Not very comfortable (I have just enough money for living expenses and little else) - **6 (29%)**

Not at all comfortable (I don't have enough money for living expenses and sometimes or often run out of money) - **4 (19%)**

Prefer not to say - **1 (5%)**

Share your Walsall Health and Social Care services experiences by getting in touch by using our services review platform "Have Your Say" on our website.

Link: <https://tinyurl.com/3778j3ps>

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YouTube: Healthwatch Walsall 2020

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**Committed
to quality**

We are committed to the quality of our information. Every three years we perform an in depth audit so that we can be certain of this.

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