# Voice of the Customer: The Eye Care Pathway Part 2

**(Jan – Mar 2022)**

Insights into the lives of blind and partially sighted people in the UK and the issues that matter most to them. This time continuing on their experiences of navigating the eye care pathway. We also asked some questions on their experiences of voting as a person with sight loss.

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## Introduction

As the UK’s leading sight loss charity, RNIB stands side by side with blind and partially sighted people through every challenge they face. To do this properly, in a constantly changing world, we need to keep listening to our customers to better understand their lives, needs and wishes.

Our ‘Voice of the customer’ is an ongoing programme which includes a regular survey of around 400 people with sight loss, analysis of what people are talking about on our social media channels, and monthly focus groups which allow us to dive deeper into issues.

Insights and findings from these channels and initiatives are published in a series of quarterly reports to help us – and our partners – better understand the changing needs of blind and partially sighted people.

Not only will this help us respond to new challenges as they develop, we will use this knowledge to continue our mission to break down the barriers for people with sight loss and create a world where blind and partially sighted people participate equally.

For this round our focus groups continued to explore experiences of the eye care pathway, whilst our survey asked questions about voting as well as repeating a series of questions we asked a year ago which will allow us to track changes across a number of topics including services, society, transport and wellbeing.

## Key insights

* **Long waiting times are a source of frustration for people with sight loss, and delays can lead to preventable sight loss. Professionals would benefit from training to ensure they increase sensitivity when diagnosing, signpost to appropriate services, and understand the importance of the certification and registration process, and the benefits this unlocks for patients.**
* **Many blind and partially sighted people struggle to vote independently – this is particularly true for those registered blind. There is a very strong desire to vote independently, but some lack confidence in the methods or tools available to help.**
* **One year in, our Tracker survey has highlighted some positive trends, notably an increase in the number of people feeling in control of their shopping and also in the number of people feeling closer to others – both likely due to lockdown restrictions being in place the last time these questions were asked. However, we also notice some negative trends – fewer people are able to access information, eye care or support services.**

## Eye care pathway

The ‘eye care pathway’ is a term sometimes used to describe the patient journey from initially experiencing eye problems to receiving appropriate diagnosis, support and care.

### Delays lead to preventable sight loss ​

Many participants expressed frustration at the time it took to see a specialist and receive their diagnosis. Some mentioned that during this period their vision had deteriorated significantly. However, participants who received care in a community setting during the pandemic experienced how quick and easy it was to access support – indicating that community-based approaches have the potential to increase capacity and lead to faster diagnosis.

### Professionals need sight loss awareness training​

People with sight loss tell us that professionals can lack sensitivity and awareness of how an eye condition can affect a newly diagnosed patient. Medical staff should have visual awareness training to ensure that they continually explain and signpost to services such as Eye Care Liaison Officers (ECLOs) – which are universally accepted as beneficial, providing valuable practical and emotional support. Participants also spoke about the life-changing impact of rehabilitation services – but these services need to be offered sooner.

### Certification and registration is key​

Registration of sight impairment should happen automatically rather than be left to individuals to process. Professionals should ensure a Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI) is in place at the earliest opportunity, and explain what registration is and how it could help a newly-diagnosed person. Getting this right allows patients to access timely and appropriate support.

### Providing options leads to empowerment ​

Virtual appointments can save time travelling and waiting, and confident technology users found text or email appointments easy and convenient. However, participants felt that having a range of options – which includes being able to call the surgery to speak to someone and face-to-face appointments – enables independence for people with different needs.

[**Listen to Usha Mistry talk about her experiences on the eye care pathway on our latest Voice of the customer Podcast**](https://audioboom.com/posts/8085732-rnib-voice-of-the-customer-focus-groups-update)**.**

## Voting

### Mixed picture but less satisfied than general population

There is a mixed picture of voting preferences amongst blind and partially sighted people, with many people struggling to vote independently – this is particularly true for people registered blind. Although satisfaction with voting in general is high, it is lower than in the general population, demonstrating a clear difference in experience.

### Desire to vote independently – but lack of confidence in methods and tools

There is a very strong preference (93 per cent) for voting independently if there were no barriers. However, in practice, over a third of blind and partially sighted people would still choose to vote with assistance. Some lack confidence in the methods or tools available to help enable independent voting and would be unsure contacting their local authority about accessing them. Over half would not be confident using a smartphone app to help them vote.

## Tracker survey: One year on – What trends have we noticed?

Our latest Voice of the customer survey included a series of questions we asked a year ago, covering topics such as services, society, transport and wellbeing. This gives us an opportunity to compare results and track progress in these areas. Here are some of the key findings:

### Positive trends – more people in control of shopping and feeling closer to others

* More people feel in control of their shopping. This is likely influenced by the relaxing of lockdown measures such as social distancing. However the proportion ‘rarely or never’ feeling in control has remained the same, which suggests things have not improved for those with the least independence over their shopping.
* There has been an increase in the number of people who felt close to others. Again, this is likely due to the fact that when this question was asked last time the country was under lockdown restrictions.

### Negative trends – fewer people able to access information, eye care or support services

* There has been a marked decrease in respondents ‘always or often’ able to access information the way they wanted (41 to 32 percent). The difference is particularly significant for access to health information (62 to 41 percent).
* Fewer people feel they have been able to manage or access their finances in the way they want to (75 to 67 percent).
* There has been a decline in the ability to access support from both eye health care (61 to 56 percent) and support services relating to vision impairment, such as rehabilitation (39 to 34 percent).
* There has been a decrease in confidence in navigating new layouts and obstacles (34 to 30 percent).
* Fewer people have confidence that assistance will be available if required in public spaces or shops (62 to 54 percent).

## References

All of the research in this report is drawn from our quarterly tracker survey from Jan-Mar 2022 and focus groups with blind and partially sighted people carried out during this same period. Reports produced from these sources are unpublished but summarised here.

This report published June 2022.

## About RNIB’s research

RNIB is a leading source of information on sight loss and the issues affecting blind and partially sighted people. Our Research and Knowledge Hub contains key information and statistics about blind and partially sighted people including our Sight Loss Data Tool, which provides information about sight loss at a local level throughout the UK. You’ll also find research reports on a range of topics including employment, education, technology, accessibility and more. Visit our Knowledge and Research Hub at: **rnib.org.uk/research**