

## Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Scotland Response to the Scottish Government Eye.Scot website consultation

**Introduction**

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Scotland is the country’s leading charity working with blind and partially sighted people. We support children and adults with sight loss and help them to live full and independent lives, campaigning for their rights.

In 2010, the date of the most recent figures published by the Scottish Government, the number of people registered as blind or partially sighted in Scotland was reported to be 34,492.[[1]](#footnote-1) Research suggests that around 10 per cent of eligible people do not register making the true figure closer to 40,000.

Around 178,000 people live with a significant degree of sight loss in Scotland, around 4,300 of which are children and young people.

This number could eventually double unless we act to prevent avoidable sight loss. The rise of sight threatening conditions such as diabetes and an aging population will increase the number of people affected by sight loss unless action is taken.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation as digital accessibility is crucial to ensuring that people with sight loss can access health information in ease and take control of their own health needs. In addition, a centralised source of information provides a useful "go-to" resource for eye health professionals.

We have responded to the following key areas: ease of use, accessibility and information related to RNIB Scotland. In addition, we have included some comments about the specific pages: for the public, for professionals and partner organisations.

**Ease of use**

Overall, the site was easy to navigate with large font, clear backgrounds, and simple text. This allows you to jump from one page to the next with ease.

**Accessibility**

Patients rely on good communication to ensure that they understand their health information and needs. Accessing information online can provide blind and partially sighted people with valuable healthcare advice and empower them to better manage their health and wellbeing while supporting independent living.

Please see below some specific comments about the accessibility of the website:

Each header on all main pages of the website has text over a block of colour which is on an image. We recommend using block colour to clearly differentiate between the text and the image underneath to ensure that it is accessible.

In addition, RNIB Scotland have created quick tips for digital accessibility:

* Use clear, formatted headings, to help screen reader users navigate your document or webpage
* Do not use images of text to convey information as they cannot be read by screen readers
* Ensure text can be resized and background and text colors can be modified to suit the reading preferences of users
* Make sure links are written out to describe the document or resource they send the user to
* Make sure information or explainer videos convey the same information in the audio voiceover as the images on screen
* Use image descriptions to share the information given in an image or photograph
* Ensure all downloadable content (Word or PDF) is made accessible.

**Information related to RNIB Scotland**

We are delighted that RNIB Scotland has a prominent listing underneath the "partner organisation" tab. As the leading sight loss organisation in the country, we want to ensure that patients are aware of the services and support that are available to them, including our Helpline, Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO) and Living with Sight Loss course.

Alongside our website link, we welcome the opportunity to also list our Helpline service phone number which can provide direct support and information to people with sight loss. Our helpline can be contacted on 0303 123 9999 from 8am to 8pm on weekdays and from 9am to 1pm on Saturdays.

**For the public**

**Emotional and practical support**

Emotional and practical support at the point of diagnosis is crucial. This provides information and advice at a critical point for patients when they might be feeling confused and/or lonely about the next steps of their health care journey.

Due to the importance of this service, we suggest adding in a separate heading in the column titled "Emotional and practical support" including examples used on the NHS website but tailored for Scotland: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vision-loss/>. For example, adding in information about RNIB Scotland's ECLO service, Sight Loss Counselling and RNIB Talk and Support (see "useful resources" for further information).

In addition, low vision services provide practical support for individuals living with sight loss - however, evidence gathered by RNIB Scotland suggests that ECLOs can be the first point of contact before being referred to low vision services - a gateway service to further support.

**Looking after your eyes**

The information provided here extremely useful - in addition, we would like to see a section about dementia and sight loss, as a useful resource for carers, families and friends who may be living with someone who has an eye condition and dementia. We recommend using the details shown on the NHS Information website: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/preventing-falls/keeping-well/looking-after-your-vision-and-hearing>

**Certificate for Visual Impairment (CVI) (Scotland)**

Registering as sight impaired or severely sight impaired gives individuals the opportunity to seek benefits and support which allow for more independent living. Drawing the registration process to people's attention via the eye.scot website could provide individuals with the information they need to make the decision about whether to register or not.

We recommend creating a separate title in the column about registration/CVI (Scotland), giving people the information they need to make an informed choice. We suggest using the information which is provided on the Information Services Division website: <https://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Eye-Care/Certificate-of-Vision-Impairment/>

**What to do if you have an eye problem**

Under this section it reads:

"If you have an eye problem you should always contact a community optometry practice (opticians) in the first instance, unless your local practice is closed and you have a sudden loss of vision, in which case you can contact NHS 24 on 111."

Not all serious eye conditions will result in sudden loss of vision so it might be best to rephrase this slightly to clearly explain that if you are concerned about your eyes, contact an optician or seek guidance from NHS 24 on 111.

**For professionals**

In 2020, RNIB Scotland released a research report titled "Communication Failure? A review of the accessibility of health information for blind and partially sighted people" which gathered evidence from Scottish Health Boards about their accessibility guidance under the Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 and the Equality Act 2010.

Our key findings showed that whilst good policies may exist on paper, too often people with sight loss receive information in formats they can’t read, even when healthcare providers know they have sight loss.

It would be useful to reference here the importance of accessible health information, clearly stating the legislative requirements for each Health Board under the above Acts.

**Partner organisations**

Alt-text allows people with sight loss to navigate whether an image and/or logo contains a link via their screen reading software.

All images on the website must contain alt-text stating if it is simply an image or an image which contains a link. For example, on the home page, the image could include the following alt-text, "a close-up image of behind the eye". Or, an image with a link, for example, on the partner organisations page, the NHS Health Board logos could include the following alt-text "NHS Lothian website link".

Useful resources

In Scotland, RNIB’s 13 Scottish Eye Clinic Liaison Officers continued to support patients, supporting 3,657 patients from 2020/21 with information, guidance, and support. This often-included support with accessing crucial appointments and operations and follow up with patients who had recently lost their sight.

940 people took part in our Scotland RNIB Connect Facebook group, sharing hints, tips, and personal stories about life with sight loss under lockdown.

We supported a further 30 self-led peer-support groups in Scotland who connected by telephone or online, coming together over diverse topics interests – everything from the Harry Potter novels, to video gaming for people with visual impairment.

We provided specialist advice over the phone to over 3,000 people in Scotland, on everything from social distancing to employment, to accessing urgent emotional support and counselling. In addition to our own counselling service, RNIB offered Emergency Mental Health sessions, giving quick access to an hour-long session with a trained counselling professional.

Over 6,000 people in Scotland accessed our talking books service, helping to combat isolation under lockdown.

Working across the sector, our shared online Coronavirus-information was receiving up to 4,000 hits per week during the first lockdown, and all the information we shared was tailored to be specific to Scotland where needed.

RNIB Scotland can help make sure your communications are accessible to blind and partially sighted people. Get in touch with our RNIB Business team on 01733 375 370 or find out more using the links below.

**Links**

* RNIB Helpline <https://www.rnib.org.uk/rnib-helpline>
* Eye Clinic Support Service <https://www.rnib.org.uk/scotland/eye-clinic-support-service>
* Living with Sight Loss <https://www.rnib.org.uk/advice/living-well-with-sight-loss-courses>
* Sight Loss Counselling <https://www.rnib.org.uk/services-we-offer-advice-and-support-services/sight-loss-counselling-team>
* RNIB Talk and Support <https://www.rnib.org.uk/sight-loss-advice/talk-and-support>

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1. A National Statistics Publication for Scotland: Registered Blind and Partially Sighted Persons, Scotland 2010, Scottish Government, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)