



Association of British Dispensing Opticians
Association of Optometrists
British Medical Association
Federation of Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians

Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee

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OFNC Statement: Response to Government's planned roll-out of a national Electronic Referral Service (ERS) for eye care and publication of GIRFT guidance

The Government's announcement of glaucoma guidance and the planned roll-out of a national Electronic Referral Service (ERS) for eye care in England and access to the National Care Records Service (NCRS) are built on good intentions and long overdue.

In the case of the glaucoma services recommended by GIRFT for delivery in primary care, these must be funded through Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) if the NHS is finally to prevent avoidable sight loss due to delays in the hospital eye service.

Improving IT connectivity in eye care is much needed. But in the case of the Government's ERS announcement today - and the £20m put forward to fund it - they have failed to provide the proper financial underpinning that practices will need to operationalise delivery. It is clearly not a fully costed plan and does not commit to compensate practices for the ongoing clinical and administrative time required to implement new systems like ERS or NCRS.

We also note ERS will require further work to build the functionality to support the clinical activity in primary care.

These announcements come at a time when the NHS sight testing service, on which the digital ambition rests, is already seriously underfunded and lagging behind the rest of primary care in terms of NHS investment. As a result, we know that contractors who are already struggling will simply be unable to take on any additional unfunded work involved in using these new systems.

For a rollout of a national ERS for eye care to have any chance of success, there needs to be serious discussion about the maintenance of infrastructure funding and implementation along with operational costs of digital working with hospitals. This needs to happen urgently so that practices can have confidence in the future and support the Government's aims. Without that, the ambitions announced today will not deliver the claimed benefits for patients, much as we would all like them to do so.

Notes

The Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee (OFNC) is the national negotiating body for eye care in England with the Westminster Parliament, the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England. It comprises the leaders of the UK representative bodies: ABDO, AOP, FODO and BMA (for OMPs) and works in partnerships with the College of Optometrists.

The GIRFT best practice guidance for glaucoma services was originally published on 18 May 2026 on the NHS Futures website.