

**FOR ATTENTION OF ALL OPTOMETRY  
CONTRACTORS**Tel: 0300 555 0115  
Web Site: [www.hscboard.hscni.net](http://www.hscboard.hscni.net)8<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear Colleague

**Eyecare Service Provision: Current status during period of COVID-19 restrictions**

Further to the previous HSCB email communication of 18<sup>th</sup> December and the detail of the recent further restrictions imposed to manage the current phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, I am writing to confirm the position in respect of ophthalmic service provision. Firstly I would like to thank you all for your continued efforts to maintain access to care for your patients at this time, your support and dedication is sincerely valued by the HSCB, DoH and by your representative body Optometry Northern Ireland. Since the onset of the pandemic we have all worked in a truly collaborative way, despite the significant challenges which have arisen, to plan the best way to support the profession and patients. As we enter what are hopefully the latter stages of this pandemic we are once again feeling the immense impact of concern about the immediate future on many fronts. Whilst access to the vaccination programme is imminent and this gives hope, this does not diminish the concerns and the issues we are all collectively doing our best to address at this time.

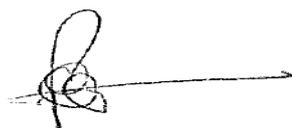
Currently in Northern Ireland, health care, including the provision of primary eye care, is deemed essential and, as such, is not restricted by the current COVID-19 regulations. This means that Optometry practices should continue to provide eyecare in line with current guidance both from [HSCB](#) and the [professional bodies](#). This guidance not only covers the [operational aspects](#) of providing eyecare but also the clinical elements of providing the prioritised and needs-based care safely at this time. Contractors and individual optometrists will have noted the recent information and communication by the College of Optometrists and the General Optical Council ([accessed here](#)) which confirm the status of eye care provision as being the '[amber](#)' phase throughout the UK. As you will know this means that urgent and essential care is given priority over more routine elements of eyecare provision which may still continue at this time. This prioritisation of patients based on clinical 'need' should be applied during this current period of COVID-19 restrictions.

It is understood that there are real and difficult challenges for you in trying to balance the needs of patients and access to care at this time whilst endeavoring to adhere to the current COVID-19 regulations in relation to movement and the subsequent impact of this on your practice business. The Department of Health have advised that the current Financial Support Scheme (FSS2) which has been in place from September 2020 following full GOS and Enhanced Service resumption, will continue as planned and any reduction in GOS Sight Test activity during this current period of restrictions will be manifest in support to practices.

It is also acknowledged that in managing the demand for care over the incoming weeks that some practices may need to consider modifications to the level of service provided and, should you undertake this course of action, you are reminded of the need to formally notify the HSCB of this using the online form hosted on the HSC Optometry Portal. Please note that any temporary changes to staff (clinical or otherwise) are something which a contractor practice will manage, but which do not need to be notified to HSCB.

On behalf of the HSCB I would like to once again like to extend sincere thanks and assure you that I and my colleagues in the ophthalmic team in HSCB are making every possible effort to support you and all colleagues in primary care Optometry practices at this time. If you have any queries in relation to this communication please email [ophthalmic.services@hscni.net](mailto:ophthalmic.services@hscni.net) in the first instance.

Yours sincerely



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Raymond Curran  
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Health and Social Care Board