

**See**  
**Ability**

Seeing **beyond** disability

# Best Practice Guide: Enhanced eye tests for people with a learning disability



# Enhanced eye tests for people with a learning disability



## Key Facts:

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- There are estimated to be over a million people with a learning disability in England.
- At least 1 in 3 people with a learning disability has a sight problem.
- Everyone should have an eye test at least every two years.
- Many people with a learning disability never have their eyes tested or have eye tests which do not fully meet their needs.
- This means that lots of people with a learning disability have unidentified sight problems which leads to reduced quality of life, sight loss which could have been prevented and increased dependency.
- Establishing an enhanced eye testing service will ensure that people with a learning disability receive the eye care they require in your area.
- An enhanced eye testing service offers longer appointments, which are appropriately-funded and carried out by an optometrist with specialist training and equipment.
- Improved access to appropriate eye care will lead to an increase in the quality of life for people with a learning disability and reduce future health and social care costs.

## Background

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People with Learning Disability are between 8.5 and 200 times more likely to have eye problems than the rest of the population (DoH Valuing People Support Team).

Most studies show between 25 and 40% of people with learning disability will have some problem with their eyesight. People with learning disabilities are less likely to have eye examinations and less likely to receive visual aids (Mc Culloch et al 1996; Yeates 1995).

'Valuing People' (2001) followed by 'Action for Health' (2002) set out plans for improving health care for people with learning disability. 'Valuing People Now' (2008) and a report by Sir Jonathan Michael, 'Healthcare for All' (2008) along with the establishment by the Department of Health of the Valuing People Now Team headed by Anne Williams and Scott Watkins further demonstrated the government's desire to ensure that the health inequalities suffered by this particular group are eliminated.

Part of the initiative was to encourage GP practices to set up registers of their patients with learning disabilities and the establishment of a Directed Enhanced Service (DES) to encourage annual health checks for these patients.

World Class Commissioning have published a Best Practice Guidance document 'Improving the health and wellbeing of people with learning disabilities' (24 Nov 2009 Gateway ref 12376) which references the enhanced eye test service in Sutton and Merton (page 58) further demonstrating the ambition of the NHS in developing inclusive healthcare for people with learning disabilities.

## Barriers to good eye care

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- People not having an eye test because it is thought that they will not be able to participate due to their disability.
- People do not know which optometrist will be able to adapt the eye test to suit the needs of individuals with a learning disability.
- Many people with a learning disability, particularly those with complex needs, need more time and different techniques for an eye test. The NHS General Ophthalmic Services (GOS) eye test makes no provision for an extended patient encounter or a non-standard report on the outcome of the test. This means that people with a learning disability and their carers do not always understand or remember these results. Even with the recent investment in annual health checks, there are difficulties ensuring GP practice staff identify any problems with their patients' vision and refer on to appropriate eye care services



## What are the key features of an enhanced eye test?

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- Interested optometrists will undertake additional specialist training on eye tests for people with a learning disability.
- Details of these optometrists are widely circulated so that people are aware of the specialist service they are providing.
- A longer appointment is allowed for which the optometrist receives an enhanced fee.
- The optometrist receives additional information from the individual at the start of the eye test and produces an easy to understand report at the end of the appointment.

## How does this fit in with health facilitation, health action planning and Directed Enhanced Services (DES)?

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The Directed Enhanced Service is a national scheme that rewards GP's for offering annual health checks to their patients who have a learning disability and are known to the local LD Team.

When a person with a learning disability is having their annual health check, the GP or Nurse should ask them specific questions about their eye care. The GP or Nurse is not able to provide a comprehensive eye test.

Those people who are not currently accessing regular eye care can then be referred on to the local enhanced service to see their optometrist.

It would then be part of an individual's Health Action Plan to have an enhanced eye test.



## Objectives and targets for an enhanced eye testing service for people with a learning disability

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- To ensure all people with a learning disability have timely and appropriate access to local eye care services in their community.
- To identify those in need of further treatment to improve their quality of life.
- To reduce the risk of diagnostic overshadowing (explaining changes in behaviour as due to the learning disability rather than visual impairment).
- To improve the information available to those caring for individuals with complex needs enabling development of appropriate care plans.
- To improve communication between optometry and other health and social care providers.
- To support mainstream NHS optometry services in meeting the needs of people with a learning disability in order to reduce the inequalities in health care experienced by this vulnerable population.

## Who can I contact to talk about setting up an enhanced eye test service in my area?

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SeeAbility has been involved in establishing the enhanced eye test services in Tower Hamlets and Sutton and Merton with the NHS and local optometrists. The two services are not identical and we believe that each area will need to agree what model is best for them.

For example, some individuals will require additional support and preparation before they are ready to have an eye test. Also, there is the possibility of including the hospital eye clinic within the new arrangements.



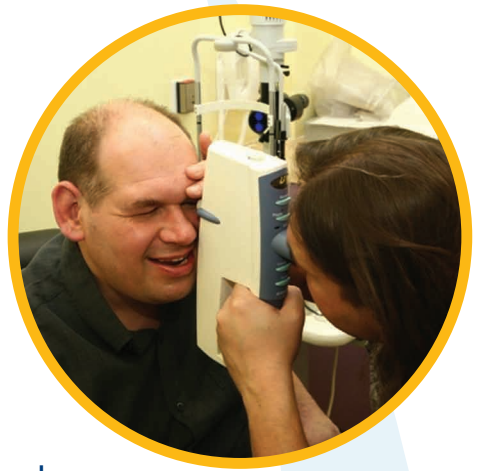
**It is clear that for an enhanced service to be set up there must be close liaison between both eye care and learning disability professionals.**

To assist, the Local Optical Committee Support Unit (LOCSU) is developing a model clinical pathway for people with a learning disability which should make local commissioning much simpler. This should be available by Autumn 2010.

However discussions about establishing a local enhanced eye testing service for people with a learning disability can begin at any time – the sooner, the better.

**Here is a list of parties who you should contact and engage with in your area:**

- Learning Disability Partnership Board
- Learning Disability Health facilitation professionals
- Community Team for People with a Learning Disability
- Local Optical Committee (LOC)
- Local Optometric Adviser at the PCT/health board
- Local Low Vision Services Committee
- Commissioners of local eye care services



SeeAbility, the Optical Confederation and the LOC Support Unit are very keen to see more enhanced eye test services set up across the country. We are happy to work with you to set up a new service in your area, based on the successes of the existing services. To discuss this further, please contact –

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## **Further information**

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The Look Up website also has a wealth of information about access to eye care and vision services for people with a learning disability. [www.lookupinfo.org](http://www.lookupinfo.org)

There are two optometry forms, “Telling the Optometrist about Me” and “Feedback from the Optometrist about My Eye Test”.

An easy read section of eye care factsheets

A dedicated area for optometry professionals to gain CET points

A database of optometry practices who have registered to support people with a learning disability to have an eye test.

List of Learning Disability Partnership Boards - [www.valuingpeople.gov.uk](http://www.valuingpeople.gov.uk)

Contact details for Local Optical Committees - [www.loc-net.org.uk/](http://www.loc-net.org.uk/)

Valuing People website - [www.valuingpeople.gov.uk](http://www.valuingpeople.gov.uk)

“Action for Health” (2002) - <http://www.dh.gov.uk>

“Healthcare for All” (2008) - <http://www.dh.gov.uk/en>

“World class commissioning for the health and wellbeing of people with learning disabilities” (2009) - <http://www.dh.gov.uk>

[www.lookupinfo.org](http://www.lookupinfo.org)

Please contact us for copies of our literature  
in accessible formats.

SeeAbility is the operating name of the  
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