

OFNC Statement: COVID-19 – NHS guidance for optical practices in England

The announcement includes details of support payments for practices which continue to provide essential care for patients during the COVID-19 crisis. These practices will be expected to follow guidance from the General Optical Council and the optical sector bodies on how to provide this care safely. The support payments will be based on average past General Ophthalmic Services (GOS) payments between March 2019 and February 2020.

The OFNC, LOCSU and others are now working urgently with NHS England to put in place local urgent and emergency care services where these do not already exist in primary eye care.

[Read the letter from NHSE here in full.](#)

The OFNC has repeatedly called for urgent financial support to offset the catastrophic impact the crisis continues to have on optical practices, with all routine sight testing suspended in line with public health guidance and many practices being forced to close their doors.

The primary eye care community in England has stood ready to play its full part in supporting people with essential, urgent and emergency eye care needs throughout this crisis. Today's announcement should provide a vital lifeline so that patients continue to benefit from eye health services. We are seeing the detail for the first time today, and the proposed stability funding appears to differ from that available in other parts of the UK in a number of ways. The OFNC will work with stakeholders to support all practices that are able to continue to offer care to their local population during the crisis. We will provide more guidance this week.

OFNC Chair Paul Carroll said:

“The crisis has placed a great burden on frontline practitioners and practices across England.

Today's announcement throws the sector a lifeline even though there is a lot of detail to work through. The new support must be used to help more practices keep running through this very difficult time, and to reduce pressure on GPs and hospitals.

“We look forward to working together with the primary care optical team at NHS England to make sure practices can access support as quickly as possible.”

The OFNC will work with NHS England to clarify these arrangements and provide further guidance as needed throughout the crisis. Contractors and practitioners should direct questions to their representative bodies, using the email addresses below, so that the bodies can consolidate queries to inform more detailed guidance and FAQ resources as required:

ABDO

general@abdo.org.uk

AOP

policy@aop.org.uk

FODO

info@fodo.com

LOCs can also raise LOC matters via LOCSU by emailing info@locsu.co.uk where they will be fed into the central process.

The OFNC will work in close partnership with the College of Optometrists, GOC and LOCSU to ensure all bases are covered.

The Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee

The Optical Fees Negotiating Committee (OFNC) is the national negotiating body for eye care in the UK and England with the Westminster Parliament, the Department of Health and Social Care, and NHS England-NHS Improvement. 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 and the General Optical Council.