

Stephen Kinnock MP
Minister of State for Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

22 July 2024

Dear Minister,

Supporting this mission-led government to bring patient care closer to home

I am writing to extend my congratulations on your appointment as Minister of State for Care. Your role comes at a critical time for the NHS, and we at the Association of Optometrists (AOP) are eager to support you in your mission to address the pressing challenges our healthcare system faces.

You do not need us to tell you and your team that the NHS is currently under unprecedented strain, with waiting lists reaching record levels and immense pressure on healthcare professionals across all sectors. As the representative body for 80% of UK optometrists, we are dedicated to playing a pivotal role in alleviating some of these pressures.

Our campaigning and policy work in optometry and primary care already aligns closely with the policy objectives that the new Ministerial team have set out. Specifically, we have been advocating for greater use of primary eye care capacity to reduce the burden on secondary care services and our GP colleagues. Our key campaigns messages include:

- **A comprehensive strategy for utilising primary care, with community optometry at its core:** we urge a shift from secondary care to a refocusing on primary care investment to realise the Government's vision for a Neighbourhood Health Service
- **Enhanced community-led eye care in England:** we advocate for the expansion of primary eye care services, which can provide timely and effective management and treatment for conditions such as glaucoma on the High Street, reducing the need for hospital visits
- **Early intervention and preventive care:** We remain committed to increase awareness about the importance of regular eye examinations and early detection of eye conditions, which is crucial for preventive care and reducing long-term healthcare costs.

Our research and insights offer unique perspectives on eye health. We have conducted extensive research from among our 17,000 members (and beyond) on various aspects of eye care. Our [Sight Won't Wait campaign](#) highlights that too many patients are being forced to wait for eye care, struggling with an

undiagnosed or untreated condition, and in some cases tragically losing vision that is preventable but irreversible. Our [glaucoma modelling research](#) provides valuable data on the prevalence and management of glaucoma, highlighting the potential for improved patient outcomes through better integration of optometric services, creating significant savings to the NHS. And there are many other examples where optometry has an instrumental role to play.

As an active member of the Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee, we believe that appropriate funding and support for optometry services are crucial for maintaining high standards of patient care and ensuring that these services remain accessible to all.

We have been working closely with the Labour health policy team, contributing our expertise to help shape effective and deliverable policies. We are keen to continue this constructive collaboration and offer our direct support to you and your team. One immediate example is a comprehensive piece of expert economic modelling about how health spend can most efficiently be directed to improve patient outcomes and cut the massive economic cost of poor eyesight to the economy, which we will be publishing in the autumn.

We are anxious to work as closely with you and your officials as we are able in order to achieve our common goals. Your new brief is clearly a very wide-ranging one and we appreciate that you will have huge demands on your time. However, it would be good to have an early discussion to consider these issues further with you and explore how we can support your vision for a stronger, more resilient NHS.

Once again, congratulations on your appointment.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Sampson', written in a cursive style.

Adam Sampson
Chief Executive
Association of Optometrists

Enclosures

- [Visionary change in eye health: our priorities for government](#)
- [The role of optometry in revolutionising glaucoma care](#)