

# A Fairer Wales: **Equality in Sight**

**R N I B**

Cymru

Golwg gwahanol  
See differently

## **RNIB Cymru manifesto for the 2026 Senedd Elections**



## Director's foreword

There are approximately 112,000 people living with sight loss in Wales, and this number is expected to double by 2050.

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Cymru is Wales' largest sight loss charity. We provide support, advice, and information to blind and partially sighted people, as well as their families, friends, and carers.

We campaign for improved services and raise awareness of the challenges faced by blind and partially sighted people. Our mission is to support and

empower those affected by sight loss to challenge inequalities and improve their lives.

A fairer Wales is in our sight. We all have an important role to play in creating a Wales that blind and partially sighted people are proud to call home, where they can fulfil their potential and realise their ambitions.

As you prepare your manifesto, our ask is simple – help us make a fairer Wales for people with sight loss.

**Ansley Workman**

# A summary of our asks

**We are calling on the next Welsh Government to:**

1. End avoidable sight loss by driving the implementation of the National Clinical Strategy for Ophthalmology, a clinically-led blueprint for reforming ophthalmology services in Wales.
2. Tackle the postcode lottery of vision rehabilitation services to ensure every person who experiences sight loss receives the post-diagnosis support they're entitled to.
3. Uphold blind and partially sighted people's right to receive health information in a format they can read by fully implementing the Wales Accessible Information Standards.
4. Make Wales a truly inclusive society by embedding **RNIB's Key Principles for Inclusive Street Design** into all relevant standards and guidance for public realm and transport design.







# Health

## 1. End avoidable sight loss

### Half of all sight loss is avoidable with early detection and timely treatment.

The prevalence of eye diseases like glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration increases as our population grows older. **One in five** people aged 75 and over in Wales is living with sight loss and demand for eye care services is expected to **rise by as much as 40 per cent** over the next 20 years.

Ophthalmology services in Wales are already under immense pressure. Ophthalmology is the busiest outpatient specialism in the Welsh NHS, accounting for **one in every seven** patients on the waiting list. The number of patients waiting for an ophthalmology appointment increased by **169 percent in the past decade**.

Wales has the lowest numbers of Consultant Ophthalmologists per capita of any of the UK nations and in Europe only North Macedonia has fewer.

RNIB Cymru is extremely concerned that patients across Wales are being put at risk of permanent and avoidable sight loss due to the lack of a clear plan to address the waiting list backlog.

The latest available **eye care measure data** shows that more than **80,000 patients** at the **greatest risk of permanent sight loss** are waiting too long for sight saving treatments – more than enough to fill the Principality Stadium to capacity. The number of ophthalmology patients waiting beyond their target date has **more than doubled** in the past five years.



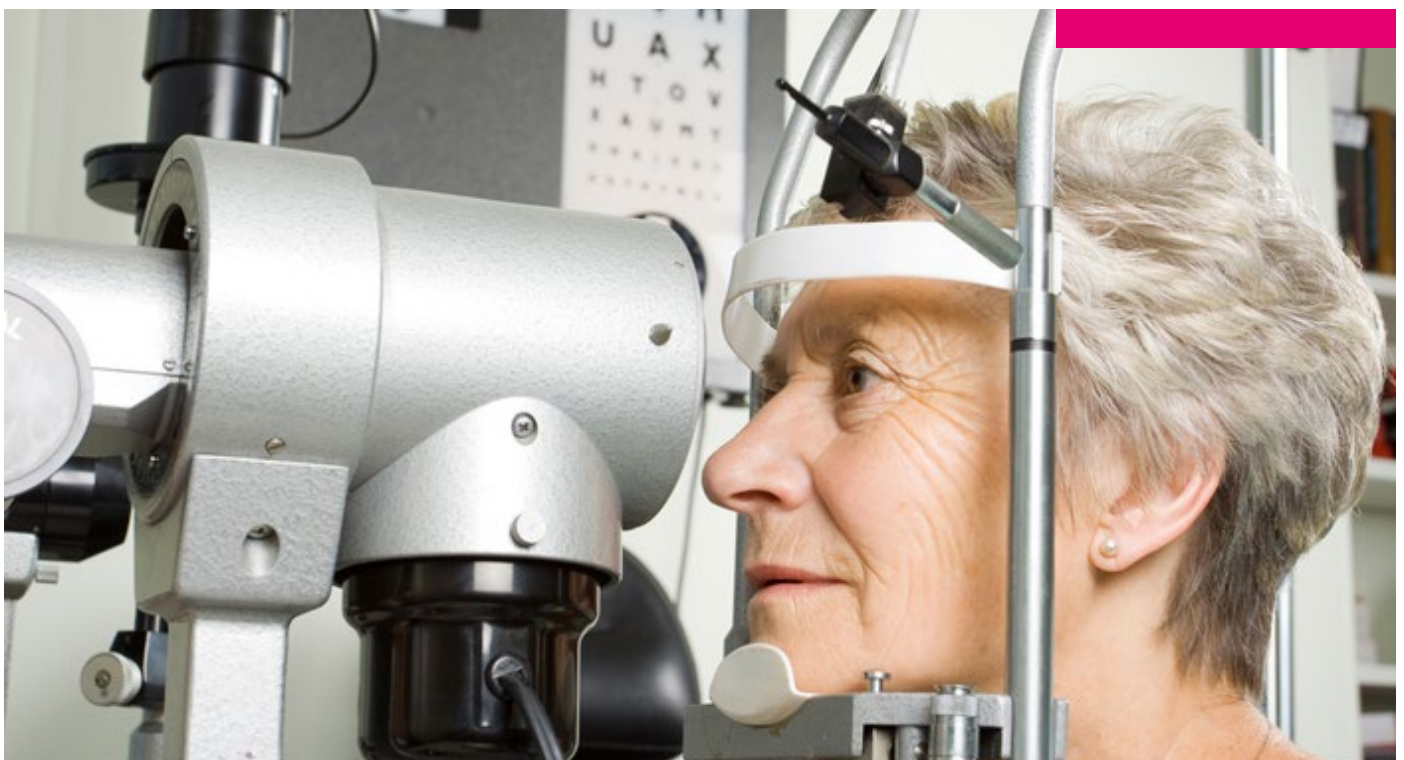
## **The time for action is now.**

We understand the scale of the challenge and clinicians have developed a plan to overcome it. The former President of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists in Wales has warned of a **"tidal wave of blindness"**, the consequences of which would be "catastrophic" unless urgent improvements are made to specialist eye care delivery.

While we wait and hope for a commitment and investment from the next Welsh Government to support these plans to improve our eye care services, more than 80,000 people are sitting at home, anxiously awaiting their fate, hoping for an eye clinic appointment that could save their sight.

## **We want the next Welsh Government to:**

- End avoidable sight loss by making the investment necessary to implement the National Clinical Strategy for Ophthalmology, a clinically-led blueprint for reforming ophthalmology services in Wales.
- Hold NHS Wales accountable for the delivery of the National Clinical Strategy for Ophthalmology.
- Publish a plan for the implementation of the ophthalmic electronic patient record and referral system across Wales.
- Ensure that patients are able to access timely practical and emotional support at every stage of their eye care journey, by embedding the Eye Care Support Pathway in ongoing reform of health and social care services.





# Social Care

## 2. Tackle the postcode lottery of vision rehabilitation services

**Vision rehabilitation is an essential service that equips blind and partially sighted people with the skills and support they need to live independently.**

This specialist intervention teaches people with sight loss how to carry out practical daily tasks with their new level of vision. For example, white cane training is often a part of this process, along with providing equipment, assistive technology, and housing adaptations.

Done well, vision rehabilitation is life changing. It provides people experiencing sight loss or a drastic change in circumstances with the vital support to retain their skills, confidence and independence. Without this service,

we know that people become isolated from friends and family, as well as dependent on social care services.

Under section 15 of the **Social Care and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014**, local authorities have a duty to provide or arrange for the provision of services designed to prevent, delay, or reduce the need for care and support. However, vision rehabilitation is a forgotten service, lost among the many pressures facing local authorities. For many years, this service has been left largely unplanned, unmonitored and under-resourced. Services are under significant pressures due to increasing demands on adult social care, tighter budgets and a declining workforce of the specialists needed to provide the right level of support.



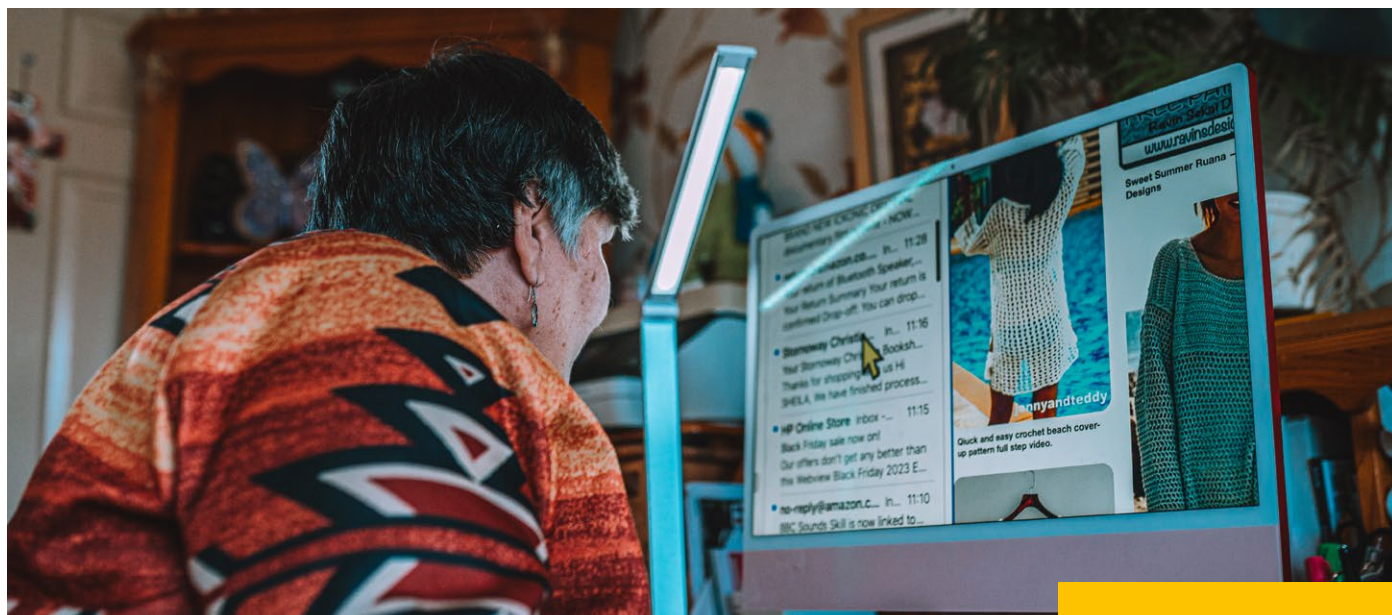
Empowering people with this support prevents future dependency on costly assistance, enables participation in work and community activities and reduces the need for more expensive care services.

"After back-and-forth emails expressing my need for vision rehabilitation, I was finally allocated a rehabilitation specialist who has been absolutely incredible at building

my confidence when using my cane. Unfortunately, my training has been very inconsistent due to the lack of capacity and there are, quite frankly, not enough rehabilitation specialists to meet the demand. This, for me, is a massive concern... how can the government promote employment and getting people into work when the basic support for independence is not adequate?" – RNIB Cymru campaigner based in South Wales.

### **We want the next Welsh Government to:**

- Develop a new Code of Practice specifically for rehabilitation services.
- Place a requirement on Care Inspectorate Wales to monitor and inspect local authority rehabilitation services, including specialist vision rehabilitation services to ensure the same levels of quality and consistency to those expected of needs assessed care and support services.
- Ensure specialist vision rehabilitation provision is legislated and planned for within any future social care reforms, so that local authorities are incentivised to invest in the workforce.
- Require Regional Partnership Boards to plan, resource and provide rehabilitation services, including vision rehabilitation, that meet local demand to support individuals in maximising their independence.





# Access to Services

## 3. Uphold blind and partially sighted people's right to receive health information in a format they can read

**Everyone has the legal right to access their personal and confidential health information in a format they can understand.** However, research by RNIB Cymru reveals this information is consistently provided to blind and partially sighted people in a standardised, written format that they cannot read.

Our **Make it Make Sense** report found that one in three blind and partially sighted people have missed a healthcare appointment or had their healthcare affected because they did not receive information in their required format.

Inaccessible health information is both a health inequality and a patient safety issue. It can be the difference between making or missing an appointment, understanding test results or a diagnosis, complying with medical advice or using a home screening kit correctly. It also impacts people's right to privacy, with many forced to rely on friends, family members or even complete strangers to read sensitive medical information for them.

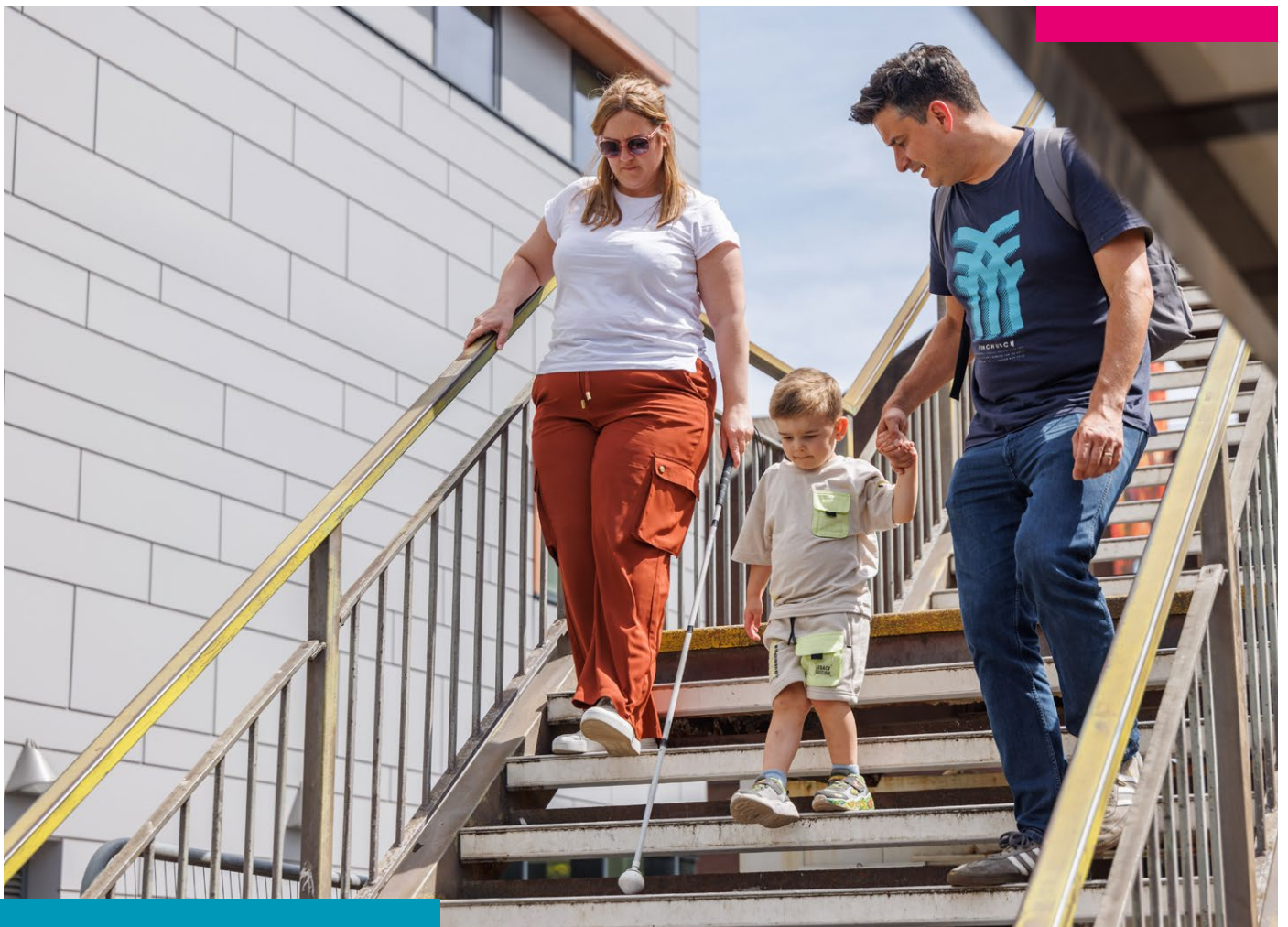
"If it wasn't for my mum looking at the package and realising the dosage had actually gone up, then I could've ended up overdosing because I couldn't read it myself." – RNIB Cymru survey respondent.





## We want the next Welsh Government to:

- Fully implement the Wales Accessible Information Standards (AIS) and establish robust accountability and governance mechanisms to hold health boards to account around non-compliance.
- Place a legal duty on health providers to comply with the AIS and guarantee that patients receive their health information in a format they can read.
- Ensure that health service IT systems have the functionality to record and automatically and routinely send communications in a patient's required format. For example, sending appointment letters by email, text message, a large print letter or in braille.
- Guarantee the rights of disabled people to receive information on an equal basis through the format of their choice by incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People into Welsh law.
- Ensure that all Welsh Government and public sector communications comply with **clear print guidance** and **digital communications guidance**.



# Transport and Public Realm

## 4. Make Wales a truly inclusive society

**For blind and partially sighted people, walking and public transport are key to maintaining independence, getting exercise, staying connected with others, and accessing employment and key services such as healthcare.**

Changes to the layouts of our towns and cities, as well as inaccessible public transport, are preventing blind and partially sighted people from making journeys safely and independently.

Some of the challenges that blind and partially sighted people routinely face when making journeys are:

- Shared use pathways.
- 'Bus boarder' style stops, where pedestrians are forced to cross a live cycleway to board or alight from a bus.
- A lack of essential safety and accessibility features on trains and buses, making it difficult for blind or partially sighted individuals to use them safely. In fact, just 2 per cent of respondents to a recent RNIB Cymru survey said that audio announcements on buses are always switched on.
- The use of silent and fast-moving micromobility vehicles and e-scooters in pedestrian spaces which are extremely difficult for blind and partially sighted people to detect.
- Parked cars, e-scooters and other clutter on pavements, causing obstructions which can lead to trips and falls or even force people off the pavement and into oncoming traffic.
- Unstaffed ticket offices, forcing blind and partially sighted people to use inaccessible ticket vending machines.
- A lack of tactile paving on platform edges at railway stations.





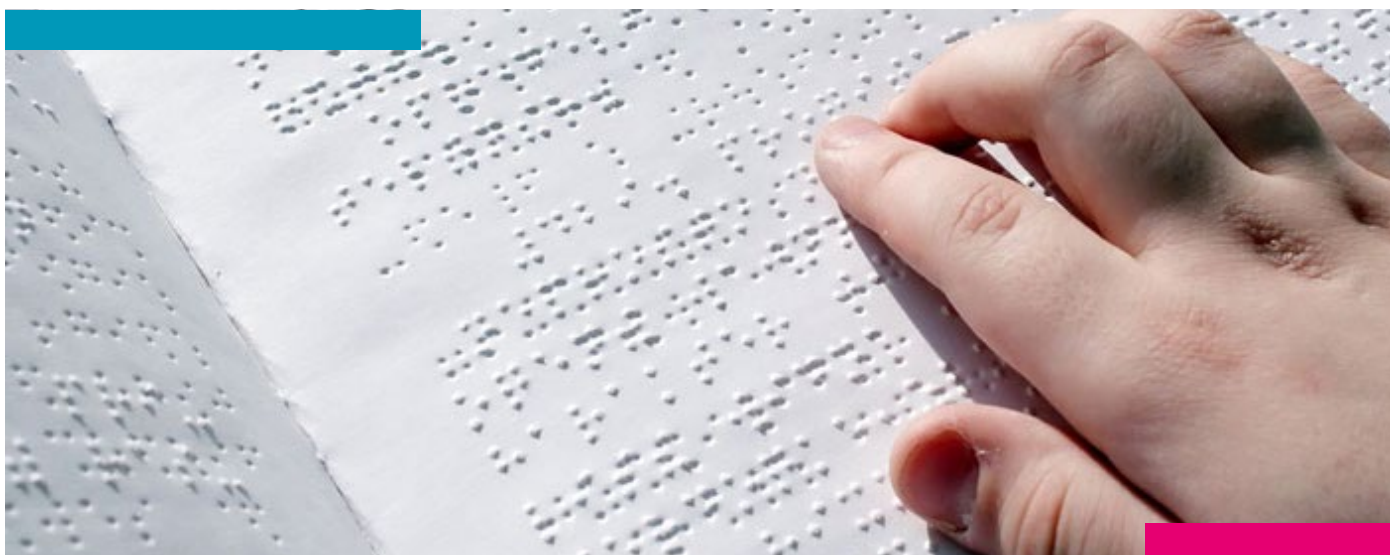
“Buses in my local area don’t always have audio announcements, I also don’t know when a bus has pulled up or what number it is, and my local sensory team have refused to teach me the route to my local bus stop as part of the route has no pavement, so they consider it to

be a ‘health and safety risk.” –  
RNIB Cymru bus survey respondent.

Inclusive street and transport design is better for everyone, enabling whole communities to enjoy their area safely.

### **We want the next Welsh Government to:**

- Prioritise the safety of disabled people as Active Travel schemes are rolled out across Wales by incorporating **RNIB Cymru’s Key Principles of Inclusive Street Design** into all relevant guidance and standards relating to public realm and transport design.
- Develop national standards for accessible bus stop design.
- Ban pavement parking.
- Take action against the illegal use of e-scooters on our pavements and pedestrianised areas and do not grant approval for councils in Wales to participate in current or future e-scooter trials.
- Put accessibility at the forefront of plans to improve bus services, through the provision of accessible information and audio announcements.
- Strive towards having the most accessible rail network in the UK by ensuring all stations have tactile paving on all platforms and retaining staffed ticket offices.
- Make an integrated free-of-charge travel pass available for all disabled people in Wales, similar to the National Entitlement Card scheme in Scotland.





## Contact us

RNIB Cymru is committed to working with all political parties to make Wales safe and accessible for everyone.



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[www.rnib.org.uk/nations/walescymru/](http://www.rnib.org.uk/nations/walescymru/)



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