

RNIB

Scotland

See differently

Looking for a better Scotland

RNIB Scotland manifesto for the 2026 Scottish Parliament election



RNIB Scotland is the country's leading sight loss charity. We campaign on behalf of blind and partially sighted people to raise awareness of the issues they face, and work in partnership with public, private and third sector bodies across Scotland to deliver projects and services.

Around

183,000

people live with a significant degree of sight loss in Scotland.

This number could eventually double unless we act to prevent avoidable sight loss. An ageing population and the rise of sight threatening conditions such as diabetes will increase the number of people affected by sight loss unless action is taken.

RNIB Scotland supports blind and partially sighted children and adults throughout Scotland to live fully and independently.

We support people with sight loss to find their independence again, through practical and emotional support from the point of diagnosis, advice on welfare benefits, and by campaigning to remove barriers that prevent blind and partially sighted people from living full, equitable lives.

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Introduction

The stakes are high for the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections. In a world of shifting geo-political certainties, it is more important than ever that the Scottish Parliament continues to shape and influence the areas that impact the lives of its people most – health, social care, transport, education and more.

Like most developed countries, we have an ageing population. So, sight loss, inevitably, will become a more common feature of our society. It is vital that we act now to contain preventable sight loss and maximise the independence of those whose vision cannot be saved.

In this manifesto, we have outlined eight areas which, if acted upon, could significantly improve life for people in Scotland who are blind or partially sighted, and increase efforts to prevent sight loss where possible.

We want to build a Scotland where education helps every child reach their full potential, employment is enhanced by a better understanding of what people with sight loss are capable of, and health services prevent avoidable sight loss and help people come to terms with their diagnosis.

Vision rehabilitation for those who have lost their sight is not only a human right but is critical for the individual and can reduce costs for Government overall. Establishing and resourcing access to support services and information is also crucial,

particularly through the eye care support journey.

We must also focus on accessible information and transport services, which are key to enabling blind and partially sighted people to engage in society on an equal footing. Our streets and transport – trains, buses, ferries – must always be accessible to all who use them.

The steps in this manifesto can make Scotland a kinder, safer, and more inclusive place. The costs are modest, but the gains for some of the most vulnerable in our society would be far-reaching and profound.

Let's make that a lasting legacy of the parliamentary term ahead.

James Adams

Director, RNIB Scotland

Kirin Saeed

Convener, RNIB Scotland Advisory Group

It is vital that we act now to contain preventable sight loss and maximise the independence of those whose vision cannot be saved.



Summary of asks

Eye health and eye care

Asks

- Eye examinations to remain free for everyone in Scotland with a public campaign to raise awareness of eye health and the importance of regular eye examinations, targeting underserved communities.
- Prevent sight loss by continuing to expand community eye care services, ensuring effective treatments are accessible and given in time to save sight.
- Review patient transport access across Scotland, noting the lengthy journeys required, especially in rural areas but also in urban Scotland.
- Creation of a cross-government accessibility standard ensuring that all documents and communications are available in alternative formats, along with the introduction of mandatory sight loss awareness training for health and social care staff.
- Ensure that all patients diagnosed with an eye condition have access to a consistent standard of support, with funded and trained Eye Care Liaison Officers (ECLOs) available in every Health Board area in Scotland.
- The Scottish Government to review and act upon on the current arrangements for registration as Sight Impaired and Severely Sight Impaired, with consideration given to establishing a Sight Impaired and Severely Sight Impaired National Register.

Social care strategies for living with sight loss

Asks

- Reconsider the decision to cancel the See Hear Strategy.
- Adopt quality standards for the provision of vision rehabilitation across Scotland and revisit the National Occupational Standards to ensure they remain relevant and the Scottish Vision Rehabilitation Specialists are working to them.
- Financially support the Vision Rehabilitation course at the University of Strathclyde and provide funding for the future development, which includes, but is not limited to: specialist topics such as paediatrics, stroke, brain injury, assistive technology, and deafblindness. This would supplement the investment by local authorities and the third sector, ensuring a sustainable and multi-skilled professional workforce that is prepared for the future.
- Consider research published by Vision Collaborative Scotland and conduct a comprehensive workforce review of vision rehabilitation with a particular focus on identifying long term future demand in the sector. Identify a route to recognition and regulation of the specific role of the Vision Rehabilitation workforce. This should take place in partnership with Health and Social Care Partnerships, professional bodies and the third sector, and be used to form a national Workforce Plan for Vision Rehabilitation in Scotland.
- Support the Rehabilitation Workers Professional Network (RWPN) in Scotland by funding and supporting Scotland-specific Continuing Professional Development events.
- Recommence the review of the low vision service to ensure equitable access for blind and partially sighted people.
- Ensure those who lack digital skills can access medical appointments and information in alternative formats, such as by phone or in-person visits.
- Ensure social care services are equitably provided, no matter where people live in Scotland and are delivered to a high and consistent standard.

Making our streets accessible to all

Asks

- Prioritise pedestrian safety first and foremost when designing new infrastructure and active travel schemes.
- Keep infrastructure accessible by maintaining a minimum 60mm kerb with intermittent dropped kerbs, controlled crossings across roads and, where applicable, cycle lanes.
- Review bus stop design to ensure safe access, halting the further installation of shared bus stop boarders.
- Ensure Scotland-wide enforcement of the ban on pavement parking, legislated for by the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.
- Introduce a Scotland-wide ban on the use of A-boards and advise businesses on alternative accessible advertising.

Accessible transport

Asks

- Provide all public transport staff with mandatory sight loss awareness training to assist passengers.
- Ensure there are no further reductions in rail ticket office opening hours.
- Make the free companion rail travel scheme permanent following the 12-month pilot.
- Public transport operators should clearly highlight the benefits they offer to travellers with sight loss, whether it be free or discounted travel or options for companion travel.

Making employment work for people with sight loss

Asks

- Campaign to raise awareness of positive employment practices such as the Visibly Better Employer quality standard via RNIB.
- Further analyse devolved employment support by disability characteristics to show engagement and outcomes for people with sight loss.
- Ensure that blind and partially sighted young people are given support to take part in mainstream programmes and recognise the need for specialist support in employment support schemes.
- Supported business models across Scotland must take account of the learning, best practice, and value for money when it comes to employing people with sight loss.

Protecting Scottish social security for people with sight loss

Asks

- Protect devolved social security assistance and entitlements.
- Ensure that benefit payments adequately compensate for the costs of living with a sight loss condition.
- Grant applicants with a sight loss condition ongoing entitlement, unless effective treatment becomes available, or if they choose to be reassessed because their condition has worsened.
- Ensure blind and partially sighted claimants are aware of independent advocacy and advice services to help them get the support to which they are entitled.
- Provide training for those assessing benefit claimant eligibility on the specific difficulties faced by people with different degrees of sight loss.
- Make sure blind and partially sighted people receive information about benefits in their preferred reading format.

Education and habilitation

Asks

- Provide adequate resources for local authorities to implement an effective structure for their Vision Impairment service which includes roles for a lead Qualified Teacher of Children and Young People with a Vision Impairment (QTVI) and specialist pupil support assistants.
- Deliver specialist education services to the standards set out by the Visual Impairment Network for Children and Young People to meet the needs of children and young people with vision impairment no matter where they live.
- Urgently implement a clear, fully funded strategy to ensure appropriate and timely access to habilitation services for children and young people with vision impairment across Scotland.
- Continue to recognise and reference the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment in Additional Support Needs (ASN) policies, guidance and documentation including any new ASN legislation.
- Support the skills development – especially in braille – for the current workforce through investment in specialist training.

Ensuring people with sight loss can vote independently

Asks

- The Scottish Government should act on its commitment to deliver improvements in accessibility for those with sight loss voting in elections, in time for the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections.
- Ensure viable audio and tactile voting solutions are available in every polling station.
- Continue to proactively identify accessible voting solutions, including initiatives like telephone voting and taking account of technological advances.
- Review and revise the postal voting system to make it accessible for blind and partially sighted people.

Health and social care

Eye health and eye care

Around 183,000 people are currently living with a significant degree of sight loss in Scotland. Our ageing population and the rise in sight-threatening conditions such as diabetes mean this figure will rise, with estimates suggesting that by 2030, there may be 214,000 people in Scotland living with sight loss.

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, we have seen positive steps towards developing community eye care services with more eye care support being delivered on the high street. Independent Prescriber (IP) optometrists have taken on an expanded clinical role, reducing demand on NHS hospital eye services and general practice across Scotland, while community glaucoma services continue to expand.

Yet, ophthalmology remains Scotland's largest outpatient specialty, with demand for eye health services continuing to increase, and more people waiting longer to be seen.

Scotland is the only nation in the UK to provide free universal NHS eye examinations. These examinations check eyesight and help identify early signs of other significant health conditions, making them invaluable in monitoring general health.

Effective support and timely treatment before, during and after an eye health diagnosis, are critical to ensure that individuals are receiving the right care at the right time.

With patient transport across both rural and urban Scotland impacted due to funding cuts, available transport – be it car, bus, train, ferry, or plane – and increasing waiting times for critical sight saving treatments, services are at a pivotal point.

RNIB and partners promote the Eye Care Support Pathway as an essential framework to transform eye care services by providing clear guidance and support at every stage. This includes the need for patients to be well-informed about their eye care, to understand their diagnosis and to have access to support.

Patients rely on accessible information to understand their health conditions and their needs. But for people with sight loss, printed information is often inaccessible. The lack of inclusive communication often means that people with sight loss cannot self-manage or control their own healthcare needs, and their patient confidentiality is compromised.

RNIB's Eye Care Liaison Officers (ECLOs) offer emotional and practical support at the point of diagnosis, while acting as an important bridge between health and social services. With eye clinics stretched

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to capacity, healthcare staff often do not have time to provide this assistance. A long-term, securely funded ECLO service is crucial to maintaining a high and consistent standard of care across the Eye Care Support Pathway.

Understanding the level of sight loss in Scotland is crucial for appropriate and planned service provision. The Sight Impaired and Severely Sight Impaired Registers

are held by local authorities and/or societies to inform the delivery of social work, rehabilitation, and other services. However, the last available registration data collated and officially released by the Scottish Government was published in 2011. RNIB Scotland advocates for an urgent review of the registration system, including consideration of establishing a national register.

Asks

- Eye examinations to remain free for everyone in Scotland with a public campaign to raise awareness of eye health and the importance of regular eye examinations, targeting underserved communities.
- Prevent sight loss by continuing to expand community eye care services, ensuring effective treatments are accessible and given time to save sight.
- Review patient transport access across Scotland, noting the lengthy journeys required, especially in rural areas but also in urban Scotland.
- Creation of a cross-government accessibility standard ensuring that all documents and communications are available in alternative formats, along with the introduction of mandatory sight loss awareness training for health and social care staff.
- Ensure that all patients diagnosed with an eye condition have access to a consistent standard of support, with funded and trained Eye Care Liaison Officers (ECLOs) available in every Health Board area in Scotland.
- The Scottish Government to review and act upon the current arrangements for registration as Sight Impaired and Severely Sight Impaired, with consideration given to establishing a Sight Impaired and Severely Sight Impaired National Register.

Social care strategies for living with sight loss

In Scotland, the See Hear Strategy aimed to provide a framework to ensure seamless provision of assessment, care, and support for those with sensory impairments, such as hearing loss, sight loss, and dual sensory loss. However, in 2024, the Scottish Government announced its decision to discontinue the review of the See Hear Strategy. The cancellation has caused widespread dismay across the sight loss sector in Scotland.

Future planning must consider how to provide equitable access so that help is received in a timely manner.

Rehabilitation is key to enabling access to human rights – including work, education, family life, and participation in society. It is vitally important for people with sight loss, especially those with acquired sight loss.

Everyone in Scotland, regardless of condition or location, should be able to access the specialist vision rehabilitation they need for as long as they need it.

In addition, low vision services enable people to regain or maintain autonomy by accessing practical advice and support services in their locality.


Vision Collaborative Scotland is a partnership with RNIB Scotland, Visibility Scotland, Sight Scotland, Rehabilitation Workers Professional Network (RWPN), Thomas Pocklington Trust, Guide Dogs and the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE). The partnership works strategically on issues relating to vision rehabilitation and habilitation, and we call upon the

Scottish Government to invest more funding in expanding the workforce and service provision.

The Scottish Government's Digital Front Door initiative aims to streamline access to health and social care services through a single platform. However, digital exclusion remains a significant issue, affecting those in poverty, older adults, people with disabilities and those living in remote and rural areas.

Currently, people with sight loss are not able to consistently access the social care support they need, at the time they need it, to live well. Services vary across local authorities due to poor processes, differing priorities and resources, lack of guidance or lack of regulation. There is, therefore, a need for a uniform service approach across Scotland.

The National Care Service (Scotland) Bill made initial promises, but since the scaling back of the proposals and their uncertain future, we must ensure that the needs of blind and partially sighted people are met.



Future planning must consider how to provide equitable access so that help is received in a timely manner.

Asks

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- Adopt quality standards for the provision of vision rehabilitation across Scotland and revisit the National Occupational Standards to ensure they remain relevant and the Scottish Vision Rehabilitation Specialists are working to them.
- Financially support the Vision Rehabilitation course at the University of Strathclyde and provide funding for the future development, which includes, but is not limited to: specialist topics such as paediatrics, stroke, brain injury, assistive technology, and deafblindness. This would supplement the investment by local authorities and the third sector, ensuring a sustainable and multi-skilled professional workforce that is prepared for the future.
- Consider research published by Vision Collaborative Scotland and conduct a comprehensive workforce review of vision rehabilitation with a particular focus on identifying long term future demand in the sector. Identify a route to recognition and regulation of the specific role of the Vision Rehabilitation workforce. This should take place in partnership with Health and Social Care Partnerships, professional bodies and the third sector, and be used to form a national Workforce Plan for Vision Rehabilitation in Scotland.
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- Ensure social care services are equitably provided, no matter where people live in Scotland and are delivered to a high and consistent standard.

Getting around

Getting around is a fundamental aspect of our daily lives, whether for transportation, employment, taking care of our health, or visiting friends and family. However, for blind and partially sighted people, navigating the streets and making public transport journeys can be a challenge.

Making our streets accessible to all

As we strive towards zero-emission transportation and encourage healthy activities such as walking and cycling, it is imperative we keep streets safe for everyone, including people with sight loss.

Poorly placed street furniture, like advertising (A) boards, bollards, bins, and low-level signs, and vehicles parked on the pavement, can turn our

pavements into an obstacle course for blind and partially sighted people.

Busy street environments are hazardous when there is no separation between pedestrians and moving vehicles, including cycles. This not only causes confusion but also increases the risk of collisions between pedestrians and other road users.

We endorse the findings and recommendations of Guide Dog's recent report, *Designing for Inclusion*. This report recommends investigating different ways of enabling cycle lanes and bus stops to interact in ways which do not raise safety concerns among passengers and pedestrians using bus stops. It also calls for a halt to the further installation of shared bus stop boarders until there is evidence to show whether they can be developed safely.



Asks

- Prioritise pedestrian safety first and foremost when designing new infrastructure and active travel schemes.
- Keep infrastructure accessible by maintaining a minimum 60mm kerb with intermittent dropped kerbs, controlled crossings across roads and, where applicable, cycle lanes.
- Review bus stop design to ensure safe access, halting the further installation of shared bus stop boarders.
- Ensure Scotland-wide enforcement of the ban on pavement parking, legislated for by the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.
- Introduce a Scotland-wide ban on the use of A-boards and advise businesses on alternative accessible advertising.



Accessible transport

Blind and partially sighted people in Scotland face barriers in simply getting from A to B. As they are excluded from driving, public transport is essential for allowing them to connect with family, work, and friends.

The level of planning and preparation required to travel is significantly greater for a blind or partially sighted person, and the majority of people with sight loss find it difficult to plan an unfamiliar journey.

It is vital that public transport staff receive mandatory sight loss awareness training so that they can communicate clearly and confidently with blind and partially sighted passengers.

Overall, in Scotland, 334 million journeys were made by bus in 2023-2024. Bus transport remains a vital service, and yet, taking the bus can present numerous obstacles for people with sight loss. From identifying the bus number, to presenting their bus pass, finding a seat, alighting at the correct bus stop, and ensuring they get on and off safely, bus travel can be a huge challenge. We welcome the recent introduction of audio and visual announcements on some routes and the planned further rollout in the future.

Real-time audio announcements on railway platforms and on trains help blind and partially sighted passengers to travel by rail with greater confidence as they know where they are throughout their journey and when to alight.

While railway station accessibility has improved in recent years, such

as the installation of tactile paving on platform edges, there is still a need for dependable, consistent, and clearly identifiable ticket offices. Assistance from staff who can offer a range of services is essential to enable people with sight loss to travel by rail independently.

The Scottish National Blind Persons' Scheme is delivered on the National Entitlement Card (NEC). This provides free rail and bus travel throughout Scotland for cardholders who have the eye symbol on their NEC, indicating they have a card due to a sight condition. We welcome the 12-month pilot scheme that started on 1 April 2025 introducing free rail travel in Scotland for companions of blind and partially sighted NEC cardholders.

There is a need for clarity about points of contact for assistance, and for accessible websites and information. Public transport operators should highlight the benefits they offer to travellers with sight loss, whether it be free or discounted travel or options for companion travel.

**Real-time audio
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Asks

- Provide all public transport staff with mandatory sight loss awareness training to assist passengers.
- Ensure there are no further reductions in rail ticket office opening hours.
- Make the companion free rail travel scheme permanent following the 12-month pilot.
- Public transport operators should clearly highlight the benefits they offer to travellers with sight loss, whether it be free or discounted travel or options for companion travel.



Employment and financial inclusion

Making employment work for people with sight loss

Only one in four blind and partially sighted people of working age are in paid employment.

People with sight loss face many barriers in gaining and retaining employment. These include transport difficulties, access to skills training and assistive technology, and employer misperceptions about their abilities.

Workplace adjustments that address these barriers are key to the success of many blind and partially sighted employees and can help close the

disability employment gap. Supported businesses can also help to generate greater employment opportunities for a large pool of blind and partially sighted talent.

Improvements in technology and adaptations for blind and partially sighted people are advancing, meaning workplaces can easily and efficiently implement accessible and inclusive practices for employees with sight loss. The focus on remote and digital working makes it even more important that employers ensure application processes, websites and video-conferencing facilities are accessible to blind and partially sighted people.

Asks

- Campaign to raise awareness of positive employment practices such as the Visibly Better Employer quality standard via RNIB.
- Further analyse devolved employment support by disability characteristics to show engagement and outcomes for people with sight loss.
- Ensure that blind and partially sighted young people are given support to take part in mainstream programmes and recognise the need for specialist support in employment support schemes.
- Supported business models across Scotland must take account of the learning, best practice, and value for money when it comes to employing people with sight loss.

Protecting Scottish social security for people with sight loss

Most social security assistance that blind and partially sighted people can apply for in Scotland is now devolved, with benefits administered by Social Security Scotland. Devolved benefits must recognise the extra costs associated with sight loss.

At the same time, due to block grant funding arrangements, Westminster proposals for changes to disability benefits outside Scotland may still have an impact on Scottish social security provision. We call on the Scottish Government to protect devolved social security assistance.

RNIB Scotland successfully lobbied for amendments to the Social Security

(Scotland) Act 2016 that ensure information and communications relating to Scottish benefits must be available in accessible formats, including braille, large print, audio, and easy read.

Navigating the social security system can be difficult, especially when living with sight loss. We want it to be as easy and stress-free as possible for blind and partially sighted people to access the entitlements which enable them to live independently.

Living with sight loss is expensive. Screen-reading software, accessible devices in the home and assistance aids all come at a premium.

Asks

- Protect devolved social security assistance and entitlements.
- Ensure that benefit payments adequately compensate for the costs of living with a sight loss condition.
- Grant applicants with a sight loss condition ongoing entitlement, unless effective treatment becomes available, or if they choose to be reassessed because their condition has worsened.
- Ensure blind and partially sighted claimants are aware of independent advocacy and advice services to help them get the support to which they are entitled.
- Provide training for those assessing benefit claimant eligibility on the specific difficulties faced by people with different degrees of sight loss.
- Make sure blind and partially sighted people receive information about benefits in their preferred reading format.

Education and habilitation

Education should support every child's right to learn, develop and maximise their potential

Over recent years, concerns over the educational attainment of Scotland's children and young people with a vision impairment, as compared to the general school population, continue to surface.

Provision of specialist education support for children and young people with vision impairment is essential to ensure they are not disadvantaged. They need additional support from Qualified Teachers of Children and Young People with a Vision Impairment (QTVIs) and Habilitation Specialists to develop habilitation, mobility and independent living skills, enabling them to transition confidently to further or higher education and employment.

Since 2022, RNIB Scotland has issued Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to bring together information on education provision for children and young people with vision impairment in Scotland.

In 2025, a total of 2,853 children and young people were reported to be on local authority vision impairment (VI) service active caseloads, with a further 298 pupils known to their local authority but not receiving regular input. This makes a total of 3,151 children and young people known to local authority vision impairment services in Scotland.

Our 2025 FOI report highlights a patchwork of provision across Scotland, and this remains a source of concern.

Only 25 per cent of local authorities are providing timely habilitation support (orientation, mobility and independent living skills) to children and young people with vision impairment.

It is welcome that 81 per cent of local authority VI services are embedding the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI) in standard working practices. The Framework defines specialist skills development and best practice support.

It is the responsibility of society, and the government, to ensure children and young people with vision impairment can access the best possible educational experience.

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Asks

- Provide adequate resources for local authorities to implement an effective structure for their Vision Impairment service which includes roles for a lead Qualified Teacher of Children and Young People with a Vision Impairment (QTVI) and specialist pupil support assistants.
- Deliver specialist education services to the standards set out by the Visual Impairment Network for Children and Young People to meet the needs of children and young people with vision impairment no matter where they live.
- Urgently implement a clear, fully funded strategy to ensure appropriate and timely access to habilitation services for children and young people with vision impairment across Scotland.
- Continue to recognise and reference the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment in Additional Support Needs (ASN) policies, guidance and documentation including any new ASN legislation.
- Support the skills development – especially in braille – for the current workforce through investment in specialist training.



Shaping society

Ensuring people with sight loss can vote independently

The right to vote independently – and privately – is a cornerstone of our democracy. Yet blind and partially sighted people still face unacceptable barriers to exercising their democratic right to vote.

In the 2024 UK general election, 74 per cent of blind and partially sighted people surveyed by RNIB reported that they were unable to vote independently and in secret. Instead, they had to either ask someone else for help in casting their vote, place their mark for them, or not vote at all.

Over the last few years, RNIB Scotland and the Forth Valley Sensory Centre have been collaborating with the Scottish Government Elections Team

to test options to enable people with sight loss to vote independently. A card ballot paper overlay, in conjunction with a phone line to give information on candidate order on the ballot paper, is now being reviewed for roll out in 2026.

We welcome the commitment made in the Scottish Government's 2025-26 Programme for Government on support at elections:

"Having guaranteed the Access to Elected Office Fund in law, supporting people with disabilities to stand for election, we will work with electoral administrators to deliver improvements in accessibility for those with sight loss voting in elections, in time for the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections."

Asks

- The Scottish Government should act on its commitment to deliver improvements in accessibility for those with sight loss voting in elections, in time for the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections.
- Ensure viable audio and tactile voting solutions are available in every polling station.
- Continue to proactively identify accessible voting solutions, including initiatives like telephone voting and taking account of technological advances.
- Review and revise the postal voting system to make it accessible for blind and partially sighted people.

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