

---

## About FODO Ireland

FODO Ireland is the representative professional body for primary eye care providers (local optical practices and businesses). Our members provide more than half of all primary eye care in Ireland. We exist to ensure members can deliver accessible, high-quality, patient-focused eye care to people of all ages and means in their local communities.

---

## Optical Benefits

The current optical benefit scheme entitles eligible individuals to:

- a free sight test every 2 years (with up to 3 repeat exams if clinically necessary);
- free spectacles or a contribution toward spectacles for reading and distance, or vari/bi-focals;
- contact lenses instead of spectacles;
- repairs to glasses if required, max 2 in 2 years.

The current rate of reimbursement to the approved eye care provider, for the free sight test, is just €30. This figure is not index-linked and it has been six years since the last change in price of fee.

---

## 2020-23 strategy

The 2020-23 strategy included the following commitment:

*Consideration will be given to increasing all classes of PRSI over time to replenish the Social Insurance Fund to help pay for measures and changes to be agreed including, inter alia, to the state pension system, improvements to short-term sick pay benefits, parental leave benefits, pay-related jobseekers benefit and treatment benefits (medical, dental, optical, hearing).*

Data has not yet been published to assess whether the Department has delivered its commitment but, given rising eye care need linked to an ageing population, a strong commitment is needed for the future.

---

## FODO Ireland's proposals for 2023-26 strategy

In order to improve the eye health of the nation, ensure timely intervention and prevent avoidable blindness, FODO Ireland proposes the following be included within the Department of Social Protection's 2023-26 strategy.

1. Commitment to ensure the amount of reimbursement for a sight test under the optical benefit scheme is linked to inflation (and as a minimum, increases in line with inflation for the coming year). Increasing in line with inflation will enable optical practices to continue supporting patients and PRSI contributors equally at a time when rising prices are impacting

on patients' health choices as well as the business and employment cost of those delivering essential primary eye care services. Committing to continue increasing in line with inflation provides primary eye care providers with the stability they need to ensure they can continue to deliver these essential services in the future.

2. Commitment to ensure the amount of contribution towards the cost of spectacles or lenses, and repairs, is linked to inflation (and as a minimum, increases in line with inflation for the coming year). This will protect access to vision correction for all for the next three years.
3. Commitment to publicise the Treatment Benefit Scheme and its benefits so that eligible individuals can avail themselves of the optical benefits to prevent vision problems and eye diseases that will otherwise go undetected, resulting in sight loss for patients and increase long-term costs for the State.
4. Commitment to extend the Treatment Benefit Scheme beyond spouses, to children and dependents under the age of 21. This will increase coverage, meaning more people will be able to access eye care, and would also go some way to supporting those at risk of poverty.

In 2020, before the pandemic, the annual economic cost of sight loss and blindness in Ireland was estimated at €2.67 billion<sup>1</sup>. Earlier detection can prevent sight loss and help those with sight loss to better manage and live independently with their condition.

Despite sight being the most valued sense, only 7% of people who make PRSI contributions understand the entitlements available to them, with many being deterred from claiming because of uncertainty, confusion and previous poor experience of PRSI claims<sup>2</sup>. More needs to be done to ensure PRSI contributors are aware of the benefits they can receive, to encourage them to use those services, and to enable providers to continue to deliver good vision and eye health for all.

The Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly has made eye care a priority. We ask that the Minister for Social Protection supports this government initiative through fair investment in the Optical Treatment Benefit Scheme.

---

### Further reading

[More about FODO Ireland](#)

[Eye care needs, services and workforce in Ireland](#)

---

### Contact:

Daniel Hodgson, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at FODO Ireland; [Daniel.Hodgson@fodo.com](mailto:Daniel.Hodgson@fodo.com)

---

<sup>1</sup> The economic impact of vision impairment and blindness in the Republic of Ireland, Deloitte Access Economics (2011)

<sup>2</sup> Nationally representative survey conducted in June 2019 by Empathy Research through an online omnibus survey. A sample size of 1,025 was achieved with quotas set on gender, age, social class and region to achieve a sample aligned with national population.