



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **Introduction of a new eye care digital system and transformational funding for eye care services**

DATE **13 March 2019**

BY **Vaughan Gething, Minister for Health and Social Services**

In February 2018, I committed to introduce an ophthalmic digital system to refer people quickly for treatment and where appropriate, to enable more people to be treated and cared for locally. The Welsh Government's vision in *A Healthier Wales* is for a person-centered approach and ensuring ophthalmic services are on a digital system is a significant step to support health boards to deliver more services outside of hospitals, closer to home and to reduce the time people have to wait to be treated.

I am pleased to announce that I have agreed £7.087m additional funding for the introduction of a new digital system for eye care across both primary and secondary care. Digitisation will help to reduce demand in secondary care and provide a better experience and improved outcomes for citizens across Wales.

The introduction of electronic-referral from community optometry practices to hospital eye departments will connect the whole system to provide safe and timely patient referrals for diagnosis and treatment. This will ensure referrals are made quickly and safely avoiding delay in treatment. Building on the electronic referral, an Electronic Patient Record will be introduced enabling community optometry practices and hospital eye departments to jointly view a patient record, providing shared care and ongoing monitoring.

I know the threat to eye health from diseases that cause blindness is becoming increasingly common and with an aging population we face significant challenges as more people need to access services.

I have been extremely concerned about the risk to patients on a follow-up waiting list for ophthalmology treatment and review. Performance against a new measure for eye care patients will be reported from April 2019. The new measure will ensure all patients, whether a new referral or a follow-up appointment, should be seen within a clinically agreed review date. The new measure is challenging. National roll out of sustainable pathways are key to ensuring NHS Wales can continue to support patients.

To meet the estimated future need, health boards need to transform service delivery now.

Last month, I allocated £3.3million non-recurrent funding to health boards to make the necessary changes to transform eye care services and implement the agreed national pathway across Wales. Every health board has received funding to support key services which will make the biggest impact for people living with conditions including glaucoma, cataract, medical retina and age-related macular degeneration. Plans supported by this investment include:

- expanding or establishing community services , to ensure people are seen in the most appropriate setting and by the most appropriate person;
- redesigning pathways to those nationally agreed in 2016;
- introducing and further developing virtual clinics;
- expanding the skill mix of staff, to include nurse injectors and optometrists to safely share care between community and hospital eye care professionals.

Ophthalmic Diagnostic and Treatment Centers are a key element in health board plans to deliver community-based services to assess and manage patients whose eye conditions are at low risk of deterioration. The Ophthalmic Diagnostic and Treatment Centers also ensure cataract services have one-stop clinics, community working and virtual clinics, which is essential transformational change for health boards to implement and ensure the patient and their needs are at the center of the process.

This announcement demonstrates my continued commitment to invest and support health boards to drive change, improve and deliver the best possible services in ophthalmic care.