



iSightCornwall



**Sight Loss Support
in Cornwall**



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Royal Cornwall Hospitals
NHS Trust



Cornwall and
Isles of Scilly



CORNWALL
COUNCIL
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Cornwall & Isles of Scilly
Local Optical Committee



Introduction

We've put this information together to help you understand your sight loss diagnosis and the support that is available to you as a resident of Cornwall.

We've drawn on our many years of experience and the experiences of people who have gone through this before you to answer any questions you may have. Not everything will apply to you, depending on your circumstances, but we hope that you will find comfort knowing that you are not alone and we're here to help you navigate your sight loss journey.



Who are we?

We're Cornwall's independent sight loss charity and we've been providing support to blind and visually impaired people since 1856.

We understand the complex and potentially life-changing nature of sight loss. Our dedicated and professional team is ready to help, whether you need practical support to continue doing the things you love, or someone to talk to about the changes you are facing.

We offer advice and provide solutions knowing that sometimes even the smallest things can make a world of difference.

We play an important role within Cornwall's eye care support pathway alongside local opticians, Cornwall Council's rehabilitation team, the NHS and Royal Cornwall Hospital's eye clinic.

The emotional impact of sight loss

We know from experience that losing your sight is traumatic. For most people it is devastating news and takes time to adapt. For some people it can take a few months, for others it takes years.

Our dedicated and professional team is ready to support you whether your sight loss is recent or longstanding, sudden or gradual. We also offer support and advice for family members, friends and colleagues who are affected by these changes too.

“ I would like to thank everyone at iSightCornwall for the help and support I received when my sight problems began, in particular the aids which I would be lost without. I will be forever grateful for the help and warmth I received during such a frightening time.”

“ It feels so good to know there are people on your side when you start to lose your sight. For anyone who is considering visiting or seeking out iSightCornwall’s help, please don’t be nervous as you’re in for a very welcoming experience. The team are well trained and very patient. We are very lucky to have them in Cornwall. I urge those who are experiencing sight loss to never give up, there’s so much to be done to help make your life quite happy and iSightCornwall can help you achieve that.”

Understanding your diagnosis

iSightCornwall's sight loss advisory service, which includes our Eye Care Liaison Officer (ECLO), works directly with people with low vision, deteriorating vision, sight loss and impending sight loss. They provide practical and emotional support for people of all ages and their families and carers too.

The ECLO also works closely with the medical and nursing staff in the eye clinic at the Royal Cornwall Hospital (Treliske) as well as the sensory teams in social services so that they can connect you to all the support you need.

How does our ECLO help you?

Our ECLO makes sure you don't have to face sight loss alone. They can provide you with further information about your eye condition and help you to understand your diagnosis, and the impact it will have. They will talk you through the support that is available to you from practical solutions such as magnifiers and daily living aids, to emotional support for coming to terms with your condition. They will also make sure you are referred into the services that you need from **iSight**Cornwall.

If your eye consultant or optician has suggested that you become registered as Sight Impaired (also referred to as partially sighted) or Severely Sight Impaired (also referred to as blind), our ECLO will explain what this means and support you through the Certificate of Visual Impairment (CVI) process.

What is a Certificate of Visual Impairment?

A Certificate of Visual Impairment (CVI) is a document that formally certifies your sight loss and must be completed if you wish to become registered. You must have sight loss in both eyes which cannot be corrected by prescription glasses or contact lenses to qualify, and it must be signed by a consultant ophthalmologist.

Your optician or ophthalmologist will carry out an assessment to measure:

- visual acuity - how well you see detail with your central vision
- visual field – how much you see with your peripheral vision whilst looking directly ahead



Following this assessment they will determine whether you qualify for a CVI and if so, whether your sight loss should be certified as Sight Impaired or Severely Sight Impaired. They will then refer you to **iSight**Cornwall so that our ECLO can complete the paperwork with you which includes the results of your eye test as well as information about your circumstances. The final step, which we do on your behalf, is getting this paperwork reviewed and signed by a consultant ophthalmologist.

Once complete, we send a copy of your CVI to you, the hospital, your GP and Adult Social Services at Cornwall Council. We also hold a copy ourselves and, with your permission, a copy can be sent to The Royal College of Ophthalmologists' Certifications Office at Moorfields Eye Hospital, where information about eye conditions is collected and used to help improve eye care and services in the future.

Once Cornwall Council have received their copy, a member of the Independence and Wellbeing Service within Adult Social Care will contact you to discuss your needs and ask if you wish to be registered.

Registering your sight loss

Cornwall Council holds a register of residents who are sight impaired and severely sight impaired. It's not compulsory to register your sight loss but doing so acts as proof of your visual impairment and entitles you to a range of benefits and concessions.

Depending on the information in your CVI, you will either be registered as sight impaired (partially sighted) or severely sight impaired (blind). Finding out that you are being registered as blind can be very frightening. But it doesn't necessarily mean that you will completely lose your sight, many people who are registered as blind still retain some vision.

How do I get registered?

The CVI is only the first stage of becoming registered. You must confirm to Cornwall Council that you wish to be registered to complete the process. You usually receive a call from the council within two weeks of them receiving their copy of your CVI asking if you wish to register your sight loss.

Yes, I want to be registered

You will be sent a yellow registration card free of charge which proves your registration status. This can take between 6-8 weeks to arrive, but your date of registration will be the date that your CVI was signed by your consultant ophthalmologist.

All counties have their own register. If you have moved to Cornwall from another county, you need to re-register your sight loss with Cornwall Council by contacting **0300 1234 131**. If you need support with uploading your documents to the Cornwall Council website, we can help you with that.



This card can be used to prove your entitlement to certain benefits and concessions. We can advise you on what you are entitled to and how to apply.

Cornwall Council will advise you of the support they can give you and may refer you to their Adult Social Care team who will give you a call. You may get a visit from a Vision Rehabilitation Specialist (VRS) who may be able to help you with daily living aids and discuss any adjustments needed at home.

No, I don't want to be registered

Most people who have a CVI become registered but if you choose not to, you will still be offered support from a VRS and **iSight**Cornwall to help you to maintain your independence.

You also have the option to become registered later if you change your mind. If this happens, you should have your registration status backdated to the date your CVI was signed by the consultant ophthalmologist.

The benefits of registering

Being registered often makes it easier to get practical help, and you may qualify for certain benefits. Although being registered does not automatically entitle you to any

particular welfare benefits, it does often make it easier for you to claim some of them. Your registration confirms your sight loss and helps as evidence in your claim.

You are entitled to	Sight impaired	Severely sight impaired
Blind Person's Tax Allowance	✗	✓
TV Licence fee reduction	✗	✓
Blue Badge Scheme	✗	✓
Cinema pass for carer	✓	✓
Free NHS eye examination	✓	✓
Disabled Persons Railcard	✓	✓
Free bus travel	✓	✓
Protection under the Equality Act	✓	✓
Assessment by social services	✓	✓
VAT relief on disability equipment	✓	✓
Free postage using the 'Articles for the Blind' scheme	✓	✓

You may be entitled to	Sight impaired	Severely sight impaired
Personal Independence Payment (PIP)	✓	✓
Attendance Allowance	✓	✓
Carer's Allowance	✓	✓
Employment and Support Allowance	✓	✓
Tax Credits	✓	✓
Housing Benefit	✓	✓
Council Tax disability reduction	✓	✓
Universal Credit	✓	✓
Pension Credit	✓	✓
Free ticket for a guide at theatres, galleries or tourist attractions	✓	✓

Support from Cornwall Council

Upon receiving a copy of your CVI, Cornwall Council will be alerted to your sight loss and has a duty under the Care Act 2014 to assess what support you may need.

There are different types of support you can receive from Cornwall Council.

Vision rehabilitation

Vision rehabilitation helps to ensure that you have the right information, aids, training and skills to adapt to living with sight loss. You don't have to be registered to receive this support and you won't be charged for it.

You will be contacted by a member of the Independence and Wellbeing Service to discuss your needs. If eligible, a visit from a VRS will assess whether you need equipment, adaptations or training to help you maintain your independence for example

when preparing food, making drinks, cooking or shopping.

They will also assess whether you are eligible for long cane training and if so, they will provide you with the equipment and the training to safely navigate with a mobility cane.

Adult Social Care needs assessment

A needs assessment by the Council looks at all your social care needs and checks whether they meet the criteria for longer term support.

Social care needs are based on things that you might need help with such as looking after yourself, eating well, being able to move around the home, being able to access community activities and emotional wellbeing. You'll be asked about the things you can do and the things you need help with.

To be eligible for support, you need to meet all of the following:

- you have care needs due to your disability
- because of those needs you can't achieve two or more of the outcomes specified in your needs assessment
- as a result of this there is a significant impact on your wellbeing

If you are eligible for care and support the Council will list all your needs in an assessment summary and agree a support plan with you.

Your support plan will cover, amongst other things, the help you can receive and who will provide it, how often you will receive help, and details of care needs that can't be met and why.

Whilst the assessment is free, you may have to pay towards the support that is put in place. The amount you pay is means tested so the Council will carry out a financial assessment to see how much you need to pay. You'll then be given a personal budget so you can organise and buy your own care and support. This gives you choice and control over the support you get.

Carer's assessments

Under the Care Act 2014, carers are entitled to an assessment of their own needs to help them to continue to care. Anyone can be seen, recognised and supported as a carer so if you have a family member, friend or neighbour who regularly helps you to carry out certain tasks, they may also be eligible for support.

The support they provide must be unpaid and includes things like shopping, laundry, taking you to appointments, assisting with bathing or getting dressed, or providing physical support to help you move around.

For more information and advice contact Cornwall Carers on **01736 756655**.



Support from iSightCornwall

Low vision

Many people who are issued with a CVI will still have some sight. This means that there is equipment available and techniques to learn which will help you to make the most of the vision you have.

We strongly recommend that you have a low vision assessment with us so that we can provide you with the right magnifier or low vision aids to help you to continue doing the things you enjoy.

What is a low vision assessment?

Low vision aids, such as magnifying glasses and polarised lenses, are not a one size fits all solution, so it is important that you have an assessment to get the right equipment for you. Typically, there are three stages to your assessment with our low vision specialist:

- a discussion about what activities you enjoy, those you find difficult and what tasks you need more help with
- an assessment to establish your reading vision, your distance vision and how glare and light affects your vision. If you currently wear prescription glasses, you will be asked to bring these to the appointment to help with this assessment
- an opportunity to try different aids to find out which ones are best for you, followed by training in how to use the equipment, and how to look after it

We provide this specialist service for the whole of Cornwall across a number of locations on behalf of the NHS which means that you will not be charged for your appointment or for the low vision aids you take away with you.

How do I book an assessment?

To book your free NHS low vision assessment you need to ask your optician, eye consultant or GP for a referral to us.

How to get a referral:

- arrange a sight test with an optician and ask them to refer you to our low vision service
- if your last eye test was less than 12 months ago you can call your optician and ask them to make the referral without the need for a further eye test
- if you are a patient at the hospital within Ophthalmology, you can ask your consultant to refer you

“ Over the last few months, I have had life changing problems which come with age, and I could no longer read or paint. I came along to my appointment with not much hope that there was anything you could do for me. But you had solutions to my problems which I had not thought possible. As soon as I got home, I went to my water colours wearing my new spectacles. This morning, I was able to read a newspaper. It was marvellous what you had done for me. You had given me something I thought was out of reach. I feel so indebted to you. A very grateful thank you to all at iSightCornwall.”



Independent living

With the right equipment and some small adjustments, it is perfectly possible to remain independent around the home and continue doing the things that you enjoy.

Daily living aids

Daily living aids are simple devices that help around the home and generally don't require any technological knowledge to use. They are designed with audio and tactile features which make them easy to operate.

■ In the kitchen

There's a huge variety of gadgets to help around the kitchen. Many of them use audio to make them accessible such as talking weighing scales, timers, microwaves and air fryers. Raised tactile stickers called Bumpons can be used on most surfaces and are helpful for identifying where a setting might be on an oven or washing machine for example. There is also a device that clips over the top of your cup to let you know when it's full. The liquid level indicator will beep and vibrate when the liquid has reached the right level and can be used on most cups, mugs and glasses.



■ Audio players

Audio books are a fantastic way of enjoying fiction and non-fiction books, and they are available from your local library, the RNIB and Calibre Audio. Audio books come in different formats including USB sticks, CDs and digital downloads for smart speakers. USB Sticks are one of the most popular formats for listening to audio books and they require a USB player.

A USB player is a portable speaker which is specifically designed for people who are blind and partially sighted. They have tactile buttons for adjusting the volume and moving between chapters.

You can also use your USB player for listening to the Cornish Talking Newspaper. Their volunteers record articles from the local newspapers onto USB sticks and send them free of charge to subscribers. To find out more call **01872 277762**.

■ Timekeeping

Talking clocks and watches help you to easily keep track of time at the push of a button. One push announces the time, and a second push announces the date.



Changes to lighting

Good lighting can increase clarity and help you make the most of the sight you have. Simple, inexpensive changes such as repositioning furniture to maximise natural light or changing the type of lightbulbs and lampshade you use can make a big difference in your everyday life. We can advise you on lighting around the home and give you tips on maximising light and reducing glare.

Many daily living aids are available to buy from our online shop www.isightcornwall.org.uk or in person at the Sight Centre. Some need to be purchased from specialist suppliers and we can direct you to the right place.

In certain cases, some items might be available free of charge from Adult Social Services.

Technology

Technology is changing the way we do things and is helping to make life easier for blind and partially sighted people.

Assistive technology is the name given to a wide range of products that help people with sight loss to carry out day-to-day activities that may otherwise be difficult or even impossible. When we talk about assistive technology, we are mostly referring to electronic devices such as mobile phones, electronic magnifiers, computer software and smart speakers.

How can assistive technology help me?

Technology can help enhance your day-to-day life and assist with your hobbies and leisure as well as work or studying.

■ Staying in touch with friends and family

There is a selection of devices to help you stay in contact with loved ones. These include large-buttoned mobile phones with simple-to-use features or smartphones and tablets with built-in accessibility options that allow you to change screen colours and font sizes or use voice commands.

■ Reading

Electronic magnifiers enable you to read text, even small print, by either reading the text aloud or magnifying the text to make it easier to see. They also allow you to change the colours on the screen to give a more accessible colour contrast. Electronic magnifiers come in a range of sizes from small, portable ones that can be taken out and about with you, to the larger desktop magnifiers. There are also free mobile phone apps that can read text aloud too.

Cornwall Libraries have two free apps which allow you to read and listen to large print books, newspapers and magazines at no charge (BorrowBox and PressReader). Ask at your library for more information.

■ Hobbies and crafts

Desktop magnifiers use a camera connected to a monitor to provide high levels of magnification. Not only does this make reading much easier but these magnifiers can also be used to help with hobbies and crafts such as making and painting models or cross-stitch, for example,



■ Working or studying

Software applied to computers, laptops and tablets can help you in a work environment or when studying. This includes software that reads aloud from your screen or converts speech to text rather than requiring you to type. Software also allows you to choose the size of the text on your screen and can make navigation easier too.

■ Entertainment

You can use apps on a tablet or smartphone to read newspapers, do crosswords or watch television programmes at a comfortable viewing distance. Many modern televisions have built-in accessibility features such as voice-guidance which announces on-screen information like channel names and programme guides. In addition, audio description is available on all broadcast television channels and some streaming services. Audio description is commentary that is added to television programmes to describe the unspoken parts of a scene such as body language and character movements.

How do I know what technology is right for me?

You can book a free appointment with our experienced assistive technology advisers to chat about your needs and find out what works best for you. You will be given hands-on demonstrations with expert advice and instructions.

An appointment with our assistive technology team at the Sight Centre in Truro is completely free. If you wish to make a purchase, some devices are available to purchase from our shop, others come from specialist suppliers that we can direct you to.

Alternatively you might find something you like in our pre-loved shop which sells second-hand items at a reduced cost.





“ I was really scared of coming into iSightCornwall for my assistive technology appointment as I was afraid you would think I was stupid not knowing how to do these things. But you explained things to me in such a brilliant way, much better than anyone else has managed to, and I actually really enjoyed the appointment and I look forward to spending my evening learning how to use my new tablet. Thank you so much.”

Pat

Social and wellbeing activities

Keeping active is good for both your physical and mental wellbeing. That's why we have social and activity clubs across Cornwall specifically for people with sight loss as well as a walking buddies scheme. Plus, if there's an activity that we don't offer, we can often put you in touch with someone who can help.

■ Clubs and activities

Getting involved in one of our clubs is a great way to meet other people with sight loss as well as trying new activities.

The clubs are run by our dedicated team of volunteers and include dancing, singing, bowling, rifle shooting and guitar practice as well as social and lunch clubs.

We have volunteer drivers in many areas who, for a small fee, can pick you up from your door, take you to the club and make sure you get home again safely.





■ Walking buddies

Our Walking Buddy Scheme will pair you with a sighted volunteer to go on walks around your local area. This could be anything from a short walk around the block to longer, more scenic routes depending on your wishes. It's perfect for anyone who doesn't feel confident to go out on their own or who would welcome some company on a walk.

A walking buddy can really help you build your confidence and give you the motivation to spend more time outdoors. The walks take place at your pace, so if you get tired or out of breath, you can keep the walks short. Although you may find that you manage to go just that little bit further each week. If you prefer to go for longer walks, having a walking buddy with you can give you the confidence to go further afield or try new routes whilst knowing that there is always someone with you.





“The lovely volunteer who picks me up to take me for walks has transformed my life. I have wonderful friends who support me constantly but our walks add so much extra richness to my life. I cannot adequately describe the boost I get from the fresh air, good company and interesting conversation. She really is a tonic for me. A huge ‘thank you’ goes to my new friend and to iSightCornwall for bringing us together like this.”

Ted

Emotional support

We understand the devastating impact sight loss can have. Whether it's recent or longstanding, sudden or gradual, coming to terms with your eye condition takes time. That's why we're there every step of the way offering emotional support.

■ Telephone befriending

Living with sight loss can be very isolating at times, particularly if your mobility is limited and you struggle to get out of the house. So we offer a telephone befriending service for anyone who would like to have regular contact with one of our telephone befriending volunteers. You will be paired with a volunteer who will call you regularly, usually weekly, for a friendly chat. Having a phone call to look forward to can really make a difference to your day.

■ Counselling

For some people, speaking to a professionally trained counsellor is more beneficial. If you have macular degeneration you can contact the Macular Society to be referred to their counselling service. If you have a different eye condition, we can put you in contact with different local counselling services.



“ So many things are now possible. Technology has opened up a whole new world of possibilities within my job and is helping me to achieve independence or run my own business. ”

Employment support

If you are of working age, losing your sight does not have to mean losing your job. Employers have a legal obligation to provide reasonable adjustments to support you in the workplace.

What are reasonable adjustments?

Reasonable adjustments refer to changes your employer can make to remove or reduce barriers in the workplace relating to your sight loss. This could include providing you with specialist equipment such as screen reading software, making changes to your working pattern, or providing you with information in a different format.

Equipment assessments for the workplace

We can help you discover what equipment you need to support you in your role. If you spend a lot of time on the computer, you might find that text-to-speech software or a large print keyboard may help you. If

you need to read printed text, then an electronic magnifier or changes to your surrounding lighting might be better.

We'll give you personalised advice based on your specific needs, and you'll have the opportunity to try the different equipment and software for yourself either in our Sight Centre in Truro or in your workplace. We can also provide training on how to use any equipment that you need.

You may be entitled to financial support to purchase some equipment through the Access to Work grant and we can advise you on this.

What is Access to Work?

Access to Work is a government scheme providing practical and financial support to help people with disabilities to start or stay in work. The grant can pay for a range of support beyond reasonable adjustments (which must be provided by your employer), from specialist aids and equipment to a support worker or the cost of travelling to work if you cannot use public transport. It is available whether your job is full-time, part-time, permanent or temporary.

Welfare and benefits advice

If you're visually impaired, there's a range of benefits and concessions available to make life easier. We can advise you on what you may be entitled to and support you with applications for blue badges and TV licences. If we think you're not receiving the benefits that you are entitled to, we can refer you for a benefits review with DIAL, a disability information and advice service offered by DisAbility Cornwall. If you need help to complete your benefits application form, we can help you with that.

What benefits could I claim?

■ Attendance Allowance

This is for people who have reached state pension age and need help with personal care because of a physical or mental disability. There are two different rates and how much you get depends on the level of care that you need because of your disability. If you claim Attendance Allowance you could be entitled to extra Pension Credit, Housing Benefit or a Council Tax Reduction.

The Attendance Allowance is also tax-free and not income related.

■ Personal Independence Payment

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is for people aged between 16 and state pension age. It can help with some of the extra costs caused by long-term ill-health or a disability. The rate depends on how your condition affects you, not the condition itself. It's tax-free and you can claim it whether you're in or out of work. To be eligible for PIP you must have a long-term health condition or disability and difficulties with activities related to daily living and/or mobility.

■ Pension Credit

You may be entitled to Pension Credit if you and your partner (if you live with a partner) are over state pension age and are on a low income. Pension Credit gives you extra money to help with your living costs and can also help with housing costs such as ground rent or service charges. In addition, if you or your partner receive the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit and your electricity supplier is part of

the Warm Home Discount scheme, you could receive a one-off payment in the winter to reduce your electricity bill.

■ Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a payment to help with your living costs if you're on a low income, out of work or you cannot work. You must be aged between 18 and the State Pension age and have £16,000 or less in money, savings and investments to be eligible.

■ Blind Person's Allowance

Blind Person's Allowance is a tax-free allowance which means you can earn more before you start paying Income Tax. You can only claim Blind Person's Allowance if you're registered with your local council as severely sight impaired (blind) or you have a document from your doctor that says you're blind or severely sight impaired. You can transfer your Blind Person's Allowance to your spouse or civil partner if you do not pay tax or cannot use all of it.

■ Disability Living Allowance

This is a tax-free benefit for disabled people who need help with mobility or care costs. Disability Living Allowance (DLA) can now only be claimed on behalf of children under the age of 16 years. However, if you were born on or before 8 April 1948, you'll continue to get DLA as long as you're eligible for it. There are two components of (DLA); the care component and the mobility component. Your child might qualify for one or both components and the amount of benefit awarded depends on the level of help your child needs.

■ Additional benefit

If any of these benefits are awarded it may increase the amount of Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Pension Credit you're entitled to and reduce the amount of Housing Benefit or Council Tax you have to pay. Additionally, your carer (if you have one) may be able to claim Carer's Allowance in their own right.

General support

Support with energy bills

Winter Fuel Payment

If you are of State Pension age you could receive a payment to help you with your heating bills. This is known as the Winter Fuel Payment. If you are eligible the payment will be made automatically between November and December.

From winter 2024, the payments will be restricted to those on benefits and pension credit.

Warm Home Discount

If you are in receipt of the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit you'll automatically receive a discount off your electricity bill. You may also be eligible for the discount if you're on a low income and meet your energy supplier's criteria for

the scheme. The money is not paid to you – it's a one-off discount on your electricity bill between October and March. You can still qualify for the discount if you use a pre-pay or pay-as-you-go electricity meter. And you may be able to get the discount on your gas bill instead if your supplier provides you with both gas and electricity.

Cost of Living Payment

You may be able to get a payment to help with the cost of living if you're getting certain benefits or tax credits.

You do not need to apply. If you're eligible, you'll be paid automatically in the same way you usually get your benefit or tax credits. The payments will be made separately from your benefit or tax credits.

Concessions

If you are registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired there are several concessions that you may be entitled to.

Blue Badge Parking Permit

A blue badge enables the person driving you to park in designated disabled parking bays and on some yellow lines (some exceptions apply). You do not have to be a driver or a car owner to apply for a blue badge but you do have to be travelling in the car when it is used.

If you are registered as severely sight impaired you automatically qualify for a blue badge. If you are registered as sight impaired but have other health conditions, Cornwall Council will need to assess your application. You can contact Cornwall Council on **0300 1234 121** or apply directly online at www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge, or for a small charge we can help you with the application process. If your application is successful there is a £10 charge for the blue badge made payable to Cornwall Council.

Tamar Crossings Mobility Scheme

Tamar Crossings provide an annual allowance of 100 free crossings for people with disabilities if they pre-register and are in receipt of at least one of the following benefits:

- Disability Living Allowance with mobility component at higher level
- PIP Benefits with enhanced mobility component
- War Pension with mobility supplement
- Registered as Blind

You can either download the application form from the website

www.tamarcrossings.org.uk or call **01752 812233**. There is a £5 administration fee to apply.

Free bus pass

If you live in Cornwall and are blind or partially sighted you will be eligible to apply for a free bus pass. You will need to provide proof of your registration with the council or alternatively you can provide a letter from your doctor or optician. You will also need proof of address and a passport style photograph.

Your bus pass allows you to travel free of charge at anytime on the majority of services within Cornwall but Truro Park and Ride is excluded from the scheme. You can also use your bus pass to travel on bus services outside of Cornwall between 09:30am and 11pm Monday to Friday, and at anytime on weekends.

To find out more contact Cornwall Council on **0300 1234 222** or email **concessionaryfares@cornwall.gov.uk**.

You can start using your concessionary bus pass as soon as you receive it. Just hold it against the ticket reader on the ticket machine, which is located next to the driver.

Disabled Person's Railcard

If you're registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired you're entitled to a Disabled Person's Railcard which enables you and the person that you're travelling with to get 1/3 off ticket prices. The railcard costs approximately £20 per year and you can apply online at **www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk** or call **0345 605 0525**.

T V L i c e n c e b l i n d concession

If you or someone you live with is registered as severely sight impaired (blind) you're eligible for a 50% concession on your TV licence. It does not apply if you are registered as sight impaired (partially sighted). You can apply online or, for a small charge, we can help you with the application process.

Cornwall Council Handyperson Scheme

If you are over 60 or have a disability you are eligible for Cornwall Council's handyperson scheme which gives you access to trusted tradespeople to make minor repairs and adaptations around your home. The scheme costs just £12.72 per hour if you are in receipt of a means tested benefit, such as Guaranteed Pension Credit, or £22 per hour if not. Materials are an additional charge. To refer yourself into the service contact Cornwall Council on **01872 224707**.

Leisure Concessions

Some sport venues, theatres, cinemas or theme parks offer concessions to people accompanying a person with sight loss.

Both of Cornwall's local cinema groups, WTW Cinemas and Merlin Cinemas, plus The Poly in Falmouth accept the CEA Card which is a national scheme. The card enables a disabled cinema guest to receive a complimentary ticket for someone to go with them (some restrictions may apply on private screenings).

Many theatres in Cornwall, including The Poly, The Hall for Cornwall, Princess Pavilion and the Minack Theatre, offer free companion tickets for customers who require assistance to attend a performance. Contact the relevant Box Office for more information.

NHS Sight Tests

If you're registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired, you're entitled to regular NHS eye examinations free of charge.

It's important to have regular eye tests, even with sight loss, as they provide a vital health check which can detect the early signs of further conditions before any symptoms may become apparent.

You should have your eyes checked at least every two years although your optometrist may recommend you visit more regularly.

You may also be entitled to a home eye test. The following opticians offer home eye tests in Cornwall:

Mann and Francis Mobile
Opticians **01872 302357**

Vision Home Services
07990 679288

P Storey Home Visiting
Opticians (West Cornwall only)
01736 331625

Assistance

Travel

■ Rail

Passenger Assist is a scheme to help people in need of assistance to travel safely on all rail journeys. If you have a disability or are elderly you can pre-book journey assistance, you just need to give two hours' notice prior to travelling.

Passenger Assist includes:

- offering a helping hand to navigate the station
- help getting on or off the train
- meeting you from your train and taking you to your next train or the exit
- arranging a ramp on or off your train

To book passenger assist with GWR call **0800 197 1329**. You can also purchase travel tickets when you call to book assistance.

Or you can book online **www.railhelp.co.uk/gwr** or download the GWR app..

■ Bus

Go Cornwall Bus provide Help-Me Cards for people who may struggle to read the destination displays on buses approaching them at the bus stop. The cards display either a destination, service number or company of your choice. All you have to do is hold your card out and the driver of the right bus will stop for you.

They also have a pocket-sized version of these cards if you have trouble communicating with drivers. The cards carry a simple message or instruction which you can discreetly show to the driver such as 'Please help me count my change'.

Contact the Go Cornwall Bus Customer Experience Team on **0808 196 2632** or email **ask@gocornwallbus.co.uk**.

■ Air

At Cornwall Airport Newquay the Passenger Services team offer assistance to people with visual impairments to travel through the Airport, including embarking and disembarking the aircraft. The team received guiding training from **iSightCornwall**. There is also a designated airside assistance dog relief area.

Utility Companies

■ Priority Services Register

The Priority Services Register was created to ensure those in need can get information about interruptions to services more quickly and have their services restored as soon as possible. People who have sight loss, are over the state pension age or have a long-term health condition are eligible to join.

■ Electric

The National Grid's Priority Services Register provides extra help and support during a power cut if you need it. The National Grid will also keep you up-to-date with any planned interruptions to your power supply.

If you join the Priority Services Register, you can agree on a password with the National Grid and if their staff ever need to visit you, they will give you your chosen password. This helps keep you safe from fraudulent visitors.

To sign up for free, visit www.nationalgrid.co.uk/priorityservices or call **0800 096 3080**.

You can also call **105** for free during a power cut for help and advice.

■ Gas

Each gas supplier holds its own priority register. Contact your supplier directly and ask to be added. Being on the register means you may be able to get advance notice of planned works, free gas safety checks, help reading your meter as well as extra help and advice.

In an emergency you can also call the free National Gas Emergency Service on **0800 111 999**.

Water

Signing up to South West Water's Priority Services Register will mean you can receive assistance in reading your meter as well as getting your bill and important information in a more accessible format such as large print, braille or audio CD.

You should receive notice of any planned works and outages and if you have a health condition which needs access to water then an alternative supply will be arranged.

South West Water also operate a password scheme to keep you safe when visiting.

To sign up for free, visit www.southwestwater.co.uk and scroll down the page until you reach 'priority services' or call **0344 346 1010**.

| Eye health

It is important to look after the health of your eyes, especially if you have been diagnosed with a sight condition so that you can protect the remaining vision you have.

Eye tests

Having a regular eye test is the best way to check on the health of your eyes. It is recommended that you have an eye test at least once every two years, unless you have been advised to go more frequently by your ophthalmologist.

An eye test doesn't just check your vision, it also checks the health of your eye and can detect early signs of eye disease before any symptoms are even apparent. Conditions such as glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy could be avoided if detected and treated early enough.

But it's not just eye conditions that can be diagnosed. Our eyes provide a window to our overall health so conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and even dementia can be diagnosed through an eye test.

Healthy eating

A diet rich in vitamins A, C and E, lutein and Omega-3 will help you maintain good eye health.

Vitamins A, C and E and lutein are antioxidants. They protect our eyes from harmful oxidants which can speed up cell degeneration and may contribute to the development of aged-related macular degeneration.

Foods such as sweet potatoes, spinach, oranges, red peppers, broccoli, kale and avocados are rich in vitamins A, C and E. Dark leafy green vegetables and yellow vegetables such as carrots also contain lutein, as do eggs. Our bodies don't naturally produce lutein so we have to get it from our diet.

Research has also shown that Omega-3 is good for our eyes and can help to ease the symptoms of dry eyes. Oily fish such as sardines, mackerel and salmon contain high levels of Omega-3 as do flaxseeds, linseeds and walnuts.

Smoking

Smoking increases the production of harmful free radicals which accelerate ageing and alter the body's ability to absorb essential vitamins from food. People who smoke are up to four times more likely to develop age-related macular degeneration than those who don't. Smoking is also linked to the development of cataracts and can make diabetes related sight loss worse. It's never too late to give up smoking and the sooner you stop, the better.

U V r a y s

UV radiation from the sun can damage the eyes' surface tissues as well as the cornea and lens. UV rays can burn the surface of the eye much like sunburn on skin. Long term exposure to UV radiation is a significant factor for cataract development.

To protect your eyes from UV exposure it is important to wear good quality protective glasses that block out 99 to 100 percent of both UVA and UVB radiation. Wraparound sunglasses offer the best protection and should be worn whenever the UV index rises above level 3 (medium). This can happen even on a cloudy day in winter so it is a good idea to check the UV forecast via the Met Office or other weather forecasting websites.



Additional information

Charles Bonnet Syndrome

Charles Bonnet Syndrome is a condition which causes people who have lost some or all of their sight to see things that aren't there.

These hallucinations appear to exist in the real world and can range from simple patterns, shapes or colours, to vivid detailed pictures of people, animals, objects or buildings.

Charles Bonnet Syndrome often develops in the first few weeks or months following a deterioration in your sight. This loss of sight means that your brain isn't receiving as much information from your eyes as it used to, so it responds by filling in the missing information with patterns or pictures.

These visual hallucinations can be very frightening. They can also cause practical problems by distorting the ground or the environment around you. These complex hallucinations can

make it difficult to judge your surroundings and make you feel anxious about moving until the hallucination has passed, which could be a few seconds or even as long as a day.

Is there any treatment?

There is currently no cure for Charles Bonnet Syndrome but there are a few things you can try which may help to manage the hallucinations. For some people, simply knowing that the hallucinations are caused by sight loss rather than being a symptom of ill health can be hugely reassuring.

When a hallucination starts, you could try the following techniques to see if they help:

- stare directly at the image and blink rapidly or reach out to touch it
- move your eyes from left to right for 15 to 30 seconds without moving your head. If this doesn't work immediately have a rest and try again up to a maximum of five times

- change the lighting conditions that you're in when the hallucination occurs. So for example if you're in a brightly lit room, switch off the lights or go into a darker room. If the hallucination occurs when you're in a dimly lit area, try turning on the light or opening the curtains
- change what you're doing when the hallucination occurs for example get up to switch on the TV or move into another room if you can safely judge your surroundings
- try to get plenty of rest – the hallucinations can be worse if you're tired or stressed

The charity Esme's Umbrella has more information and resources for people who have Charles Bonnet Syndrome. You can find out more at www.charlesbonnetsyndrome.uk or call **303 123 9999**. Calls are answered by the RNIB Eye Health Team, who work in conjunction with Esme's Umbrella.

Your rights

Being certified as sight impaired or severely sight impaired means that you're automatically protected from unfair treatment under the Equality Act 2010.

If you feel you have been treated unfairly because of your sight loss or find it difficult to access services because reasonable changes have not been made, you can challenge this.

For example, if you have difficulty with reading documents, you can ask for them to be sent to you in large print. If this does not happen, it is a form of discrimination that you can challenge.

If this doesn't resolve things, you can get advice from RNIB's Helpline on **0303 123 9999**, Citizens Advice Cornwall on **0800 144 8848** or disAbility Cornwall's information and advice line on **01736 759500**.

Useful Organisations

Cornish Organisations

■ Age UK Cornwall

Age UK helps older people by providing information, advice and support. For more information call **01872 266383** or visit **www.ageuk.org.uk/cornwall**.

■ Citizen's Advice Cornwall

Citizen's Advice offers free, independent and confidential advice for anyone, whatever their problem. Visit **www.citizensadvicecornwall.org.uk** or call **0800 144 8848**.

■ Cornish Talking Newspaper

Volunteers at Cornish Talking Newspapers record articles from the local newspapers onto USB sticks and send them free of charge to subscribers. Call **01872 277762** to find out more.

■ Cornwall Council

Cornwall Council provide advice, information and aids for people with visual impairments. Contact Adult Social Care and Support on **0300 1234 131**.

To join your local Cornwall Council library call **0300 1234 111** or email **libraries@cornwall.gov.uk**.

■ disAbility Cornwall and Isles of Scilly

disAbility Cornwall and Isles of Scilly represent, include, support and empower anyone living with a long-term health condition or disability in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. They operate an information and advice line and can help you with money and welfare enquiries, advocacy, social opportunities, training and employment opportunities. For more information call **01736 759500** or visit **www.disabilitycornwall.org.uk**.

■ Hearing Loss Cornwall

Hearing Loss Cornwall support people who are living with deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus. They provide information, advice, training and communication support, including British Sign Language interpretation services. For more information visit www.hearinglosscornwall.org or call **01872 225868**.

■ Macular Society Groups

The Macular Society is a national charity but they have a number of local groups across Cornwall including Truro, Camborne and Redruth, Liskeard, Penzance, Torpoint and Saltash. These groups can provide support, social opportunities and help and advice. For more information call **0300 3030 111** or visit www.macularsociety.org.



National organisations

■ Blind Veterans UK

Blind Veterans UK provides free services and support to vision impaired Armed Forces and National Service veterans, no matter when they served or how they lost their sight. For more information, call **0800 389 7979** or visit **www.blindveterans.org.uk**.

■ British Blind Sport

British Blind Sport enables blind and partially sighted people to have the same opportunities as sighted people to access and enjoy sport and recreational activities in the UK. For more information, call **01926 424247** or visit **www.britishblindsport.org.uk**.

■ Calibre Audio

Calibre Audio provides a collection of over 17,000 audiobooks for people with sight loss in the UK and overseas. Visit **www.calibreaudio.org.uk** or call **01296 432339**.

■ Deafblind UK

Deafblind UK provides specialist services to deafblind people and those who have progressive sight and hearing loss acquired throughout their lives. For more information, call **0800 132 320** or visit **www.deafblind.org.uk**.

Directory enquiries

If you're registered as severely sight impaired or sight impaired, you can make use of the free directory enquiries service. You can use this service whether or not you are with BT. To sign up for this service call **0800 587 0195**. Once signed up, all you have to do is to dial 195 and you can talk to a trained operator who will help you with your enquiry. If you ask to be connected to the number you need, you will then be charged for the call.

■ Esme's Umbrella (Charles Bonnet Syndrome)

Esme's Umbrella is a charity working towards a greater awareness of Charles Bonnet Syndrome. For more information, call **0345 051 3925** or visit **www.charlesbonnetsyndrome.uk**.

■ Guide Dogs

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association not only provides guide dogs but also offers a range of other mobility services, giving advice and supporting those with sight loss. For more information, call **0800 953 0113** or visit **www.guidedogs.org.uk**.

■ Macular Society

The Macular Society helps people with Macular Degeneration and funds research into the condition. Contact **0300 3030 111** or visit **www.macularsociety.org** for more information.

■ RNIB

The RNIB offers practical and emotional support for people living with sight loss, as well as their hugely popular talking books service. For more information, call the Helpline on **0303 123 9999** or visit **www.rnib.org.uk**

■ SeeAbility

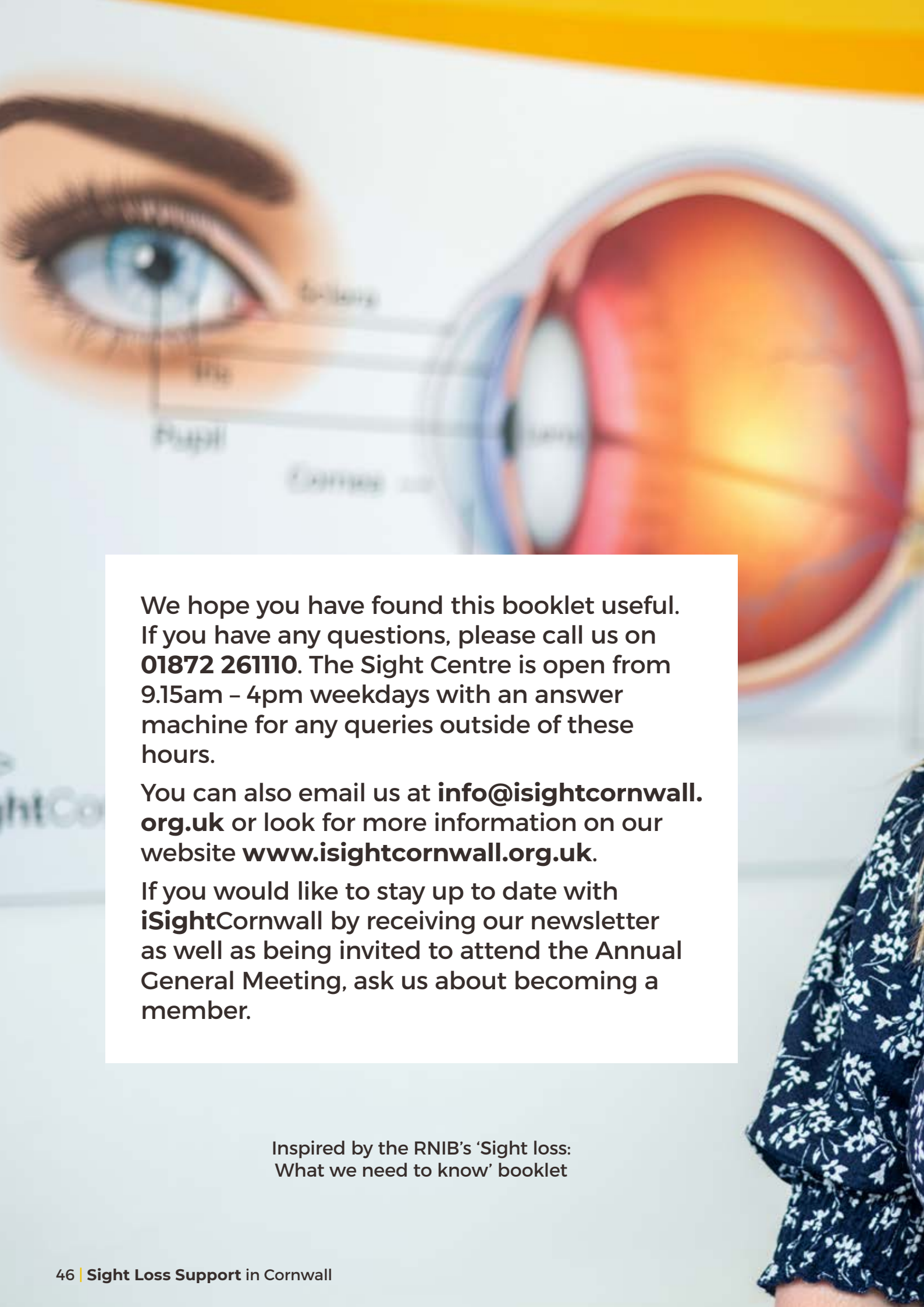
SeeAbility supports people with sight loss and multiple disabilities. They provide specialist support and accommodation services as well as raising awareness to help prevent avoidable sight loss for people with learning disabilities. For more information, call **01372 755 000** or visit **www.seeability.org**

■ Sense

Sense supports adults and children who are deafblind or have sensory impairments with additional needs. For more information, call **033 330 9256** or visit **www.sense.org**

■ Silver Line

The Silver Line Helpline run by Age UK is a free, 24-hour telephone service for older people across the UK. They offer friendship, conversation, and support for people aged 55 or over, especially those who may be experiencing feelings of loneliness and isolation. Call them for free on **0800 4 70 80 90**.



We hope you have found this booklet useful. If you have any questions, please call us on **01872 261110**. The Sight Centre is open from 9.15am – 4pm weekdays with an answer machine for any queries outside of these hours.

You can also email us at **info@isightcornwall.org.uk** or look for more information on our website **www.isightcornwall.org.uk**.

If you would like to stay up to date with **iSightCornwall** by receiving our newsletter as well as being invited to attend the Annual General Meeting, ask us about becoming a member.

Inspired by the RNIB's 'Sight loss:
What we need to know' booklet



iSightCornwall is Cornwall's local,
independent sight loss charity. Our dedicated
and professional team is ready to help
everyone with sight loss, whether recent
or longstanding, sudden or gradual. We'll
help you to understand your eye condition
and provide you with practical support to
continue doing the things you love.

Also available in large print and audio

Telephone **01872 261110**
www.isightcornwall.org.uk

iSightCornwall
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Registered Charity No. 1108761