



Our Ref: AH/SMM

11 August 2021

Jenny Rathbone MS  
Chair  
Equality and Social Justice Committee

Dear Jenny

I recently met with RNIB Cymru (Royal National Institute of Blind People) and was interested to learn more about the challenges that people with sight loss face daily in Wales.

Since the pandemic, blind and partially sighted people have faced additional challenges, some exacerbated by the necessitated changes and restrictions. For example, social distancing is by definition more difficult – if not impossible – for those who cannot use vision to judge distance.

I understand that there have been and continue to be issues with the accessibility of public health information. For example, letters inviting individuals for a vaccine, have not routinely been available in accessible formats. Information available and guidance at vaccine centres has not been accessible and we have heard of the particularly poor experiences of some individuals with sight loss going to receive their vaccine. I feel this is a matter of equality. Blind and partially sighted members of our community should have equal access to care.

In eye care, we know that the pandemic has meant a huge backlog of appointments across all eye conditions. However, even before coronavirus, people were losing sight because of the phenomenal waiting times. In January 2021, of the highest risk category patients, 57.3 per cent – **nearly two thirds of the waiting list** – were beyond target and therefore listed as being at risk of irreversible harm or significant adverse outcome.

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The Welsh Government introduced Eye Care Measures in 2018 to support Health Boards to prioritise patients based on their clinical needs. As the first country in the UK to have dedicated targets for eye care, these should be welcomed, but what we have now is stark evidence as to the scale of the problem being faced. No one should lose their sight because of needless waits for treatment.

Given the disproportionate impact that this community continues to feel, I would be keen to bring the challenges to the attention of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

*Altaf*

Dr Altaf Hussain  
Shadow Minister for Equalities

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