



Our ref: WQ88004, WQ88005 & WQ88006

Russell George MS  
Senedd Constituency Member for Montgomeryshire

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27 April 2023

Dear Russell

Thank you for your recent written questions as follows:

- What plans does the Minister have to work with NHS primary care optometrists who provide adult hearing loss services to address the unmet need for age-related hearing loss services?
- What assessment has the Minister made of how organisations already working with NHS health boards to provide a wide range of eye health services and sight tests could help address the unmet need for age-related hearing loss services?
- What plans does the Minister have to tackle the unmet need for age-related hearing loss services?

The Welsh Government recognises that loss of sight and/or hearing at any age can be devastating and as a result can leave people feeling isolated and detached from the world around them. Early intervention and diagnosis are paramount for the health and well-being of these individuals.

NHS Wales optometry and audiology services are delivered differently to the rest of the UK; with a much stronger emphasis on more treatment and care being delivered in the community, and our primary care services are underpinned by prudent health care principles. They are both patient centred and make the most effective use of all available resources, across primary and secondary care.

Over the past 5 years, increasing numbers of NHS optometrists and NHS audiologists have gained additional higher qualifications to diagnose, manage and treat more patients in primary care. This approach is already significantly reducing the demand for a hospital opinion and intervention and demand on GP services and emergency departments. As further innovative new optometry and audiology primary care services are developed, more time and resources will be released.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Wales continues to be a leader in optometry and audiology service provision in the UK. Scotland and Northern Ireland are already replicating the work we have pioneered, and England are seeking advice - they are particularly keen to learn about developments in primary care Clusters.

The approach being taken in Wales will result in a significant reform of delivery of hearing health care services, aligned to all Welsh Government strategic documents, including Programme for Government commitments, *A Healthier Wales* (<https://www.gov.wales/healthier-wales-long-term-plan-health-and-social-care>), the *Framework of Action* (<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/integrated-framework-of-care-and-support-for-people-who-are-d-deaf-or-living-with-hearing-loss.pdf>) and the national Audiology Quality Standards.

The Welsh Government is in regular dialogue with the optometry and audiology professions regarding the action underway and will continue to meet with these stakeholders, to consider current and future plans for service provision in Wales.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Morgan'.

**Eluned Morgan AS/MS**

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol  
Minister for Health and Social Services