

## ECOO NEWS

# WHAT DO YOUR LEADERS THINK ABOUT #LOVEYOUREYES?



*Thursday, 8 October 2026*

### ECOO CALLS ON EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS TO ACT AHEAD OF THE GLOBAL SUMMIT FOR EYE HEALTH

*Every October, World Sight Day invites people across Europe to take a moment to think about their eye health. This year, ECOO is asking a slightly different question: not only whether individuals love their eyes, but **whether the leaders responsible for public health policy are giving eye health the attention it deserves.***

*This is a timely question as on 2 November 2026, the **first-ever Global Summit for Eye Health** will bring together heads of government and health ministers in Antigua and Barbuda. It represents an important opportunity and momentum for leaders across the world, including Europe.*

### The state of eye health in Europe

Eye health is not a niche concern. Approximately 90 million people across the WHO European Region live with some form of vision impairment or blindness. **Most eye diseases are asymptomatic in their early stages, so patients cannot feel or see them coming.** They progress without pain or warning and by the time any of these conditions become apparent, irreversible damage has often already occurred.

A routine eye examination is **the only way to detect these conditions in time.** Yet in most European countries, it is not funded within the national health system. Whether a patient's condition is caught early depends too often on where they live and what they can afford, a health equity gap which can be addressed by our leaders.

The scale is significant: 12.3 million

Europeans have glaucoma, yet more than half are undiagnosed. AMD late-stage cases are projected to reach 4.8 million by 2040, almost double today. Between 20% and 35% of Europeans with diabetes will develop diabetic retinopathy. Within this same picture sits myopia, easily corrected in the short term yet carrying risks that go far beyond simple refractive error: 227 million people in Europe are already affected, and by 2035, half of all European school leavers are projected to be myopic.

### **Political commitment and economic Evidence**

The good news is that European governments have signed up to a series of landmark **global commitments on eye health**: the WHO World Report on Vision in 2019, World Health Assembly Resolution 73.4 in 2020, measurable 2030 targets agreed by every health minister in 2021 and the unanimous UN General Assembly resolution later that year committing all 193 member states to eye care for all by 2030.

Governments have the political commitment. They now have the economic evidence to match it. The Value of Vision report, published in September 2025 by IAPB, Seva Foundation and Fred Hollows Foundation, shows that every **\$1 invested in eye health returns \$28**, and that a \$7.1 billion (≈ €6.1 billion) investment could generate \$199 billion (≈ €171.1 billion) in productivity gains by 2030.

### **ECOO's Call to Action**

ECOO represents optometrists and opticians across 25 European countries, the professionals who, for most Europeans, are the first point of contact for eye care. **There is thus a 200.000+ accessible community-based workforce that can contribute to better vision and earlier detection**

The professionals already have the clinical competence to detect sight-threatening conditions well before a patient notices symptoms, often during a routine visit for a new prescription. In several European countries their role is formally recognised within the health system. Where it is not, patients and the conditions affecting their sight fall outside the primary care pathway.

The EU has an important role to play in coordinating across borders, sharing best practice and keeping eye health on the political agenda. However, healthcare is a national competency, and it is member states that must act. With that in mind, ECOO calls on European governments to take three steps.

- **Recognise optometrists and opticians** as the first point of contact for community eye care. Where this recognition is not yet in place, ECOO calls on governments to act, ensuring that early detection is fully embedded in the care pathway.

- **Fund routine eye examinations** within national health systems, in line with universal health coverage commitments already made at global level. Early detection should be available to every patient, regardless of where they live or what they can afford.
  - **Develop a national eye health plan** and bring a concrete, measurable commitment to the Global Summit on 2 November 2026.
- The political foundations are firmly in place. The Global Summit on Eye Health is the opportunity to build on them.

#### Resources:

- <https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/eye-and-vision-care>
- <https://www.euroblind.org/about-blindness-and-partial-sight/facts-and-figures>
- <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40499787/>
- <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5755466/>; [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(13\)70145-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(13)70145-1/fulltext)
- <https://idf.org/europe/life-with-diabetes/diabetes-related-complications/eye-disease/>; <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31515657/>
- <https://www.iapb.org/learn/resources/prevalence-of-refractive-error-in-europe/>; <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10654-015-0010-0>
- [https://www.iapb.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Childrens-eye-health\\_Joint-Policy-Statement\\_17-04-2025.pdf](https://www.iapb.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Childrens-eye-health_Joint-Policy-Statement_17-04-2025.pdf)
- <https://visionatlas.iapb.org/news/the-value-of-vision-the-case-for-investing-in-eye-health/>

## ABOUT ECOO

The European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO) represents the interests of optometrists and opticians across Europe. Our members are national professional associations from 25 countries who together represent more than 200,000 opticians and optometrists. ECOO aims to promote eye health to the public across borders and to harmonise clinical and educational standards of optometric and optical practice throughout Europe.