

# How to support people who are blind or have sight loss

## A guide for GP practice staff

### Patient Online and RNIB



#### Organisation

RNIB, representing people who are blind or have sight loss.

[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

### Information about people who are blind or have sight loss

In the UK there are 360,000 adults who are registered as blind or unable to see very well. About 80,000 are of working age.

Another 1.5 million people cannot see well enough to read a newspaper even if they are wearing glasses. Many of these people will use bigger text when reading on a screen. These people have sight loss, which is not serious enough to be called blind. Most of these people are older than 65.

The number of older people with sight loss who use GP online services is much lower than the number of people of the same age who can see well.

There are 358,000 people in the UK who have both sight and hearing loss. Many of these people also have learning disabilities or autism.

It is important to make sure you find out and use the right way of sharing information with each person.

### What people who are blind or have sight loss need

Most people who are blind or have sight loss use special accessibility programmes on their computer, laptop or tablet to help them access information. These are:

- screen magnification – makes the words bigger on the screen
- high contrast – makes words very clear and changes colours
- audio screen reader – reads out the words on the screen.

Some people can use bigger text which is often built into websites. For other people, this is not big enough and they have to use screen magnification programmes. They may also need to change the background colour on the screen to make it easier to read.

People who are blind are most likely to use computer programmes that read out the writing on the screen. These are called audio screen readers.

## **How practices can help people who are blind or have sight loss**

To make it as simple as possible for people with sight loss, websites should be built to use audio screen readers, screen magnification and high contrast.

Some examples of audio screen readers are:

- Apple's **Voiceover**
- Android's **Talkback**
- Microsoft's **Narrator**.

Make sure that when you design and test your website, it uses appropriate computer and tablet accessibility settings. For example:

- use larger font size settings
- make use of audio and vibration
- allow the background colour to be changed

There are lots of other programmes and apps that people can use on their computer or phone to help them.

RNIB recommends that practices get advice from an expert on how to properly use the guidelines listed below:

- Access 8878: Web Accessibility - Code of Practice  
[www.access8878.co.uk](http://www.access8878.co.uk)
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0 and 2.0  
[www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20](http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20)
- Accessibility - Apple [www.apple.com/accessibility](http://www.apple.com/accessibility)
- Accessibility – Google  
[www.google.com/design/spec/usability/accessibility.html#accessibility-navigation](http://www.google.com/design/spec/usability/accessibility.html#accessibility-navigation)

## Support for practice staff

People with sight loss find it difficult or impossible to see the written information on posters and leaflets. This means that many do not know about GP online services.

Make contact with patients on your patient list who have sight loss but who might not have made their needs known previously. Take the time to find out what their needs are.

An appropriate staff member could search the practice patient lists using different keywords to identify those that might be blind or have sight loss and would benefit from additional support to access services. (It is important to follow guidance contained in your practice policies about accessing patient data).

Think about phoning, texting or sending accessible letters, to let these patients know about how GP online services can help them. Offering a bit of help and support to get over any obstacles is often appreciated.

**ASK:** All practice staff, especially GP receptionists, should ask people who have sight loss which is the best way for them to be given information.

Giving printed information to people who have sight loss means that they probably will not read it and so might miss out on online services. Instead think about:

- sharing passwords, guides and instructions in different formats like large print, email, braille or audio
- making sure you can email people, particularly if they say that is the only format they are able to read
- making sure how they want to receive information is noted in their medical record
- making sure GP online services are given as an option.

**ENCOURAGE:** Every day, more and more people who are blind or who have sight loss are using computers and tablets. However, it is usually harder for them than for people who can see. Knowing about GP online services may give them the confidence to take those extra steps to get online.

**TALK:** Talking is always best. Tell everyone about the benefits of online services and how they can make their lives easier, for example:

- private messages from you to your doctor
- booking appointments
- ordering repeat prescriptions
- getting test results
- looking at their medical records.

**Make noise:** Contact local 'talking' newspapers and groups that support people with sight loss to let them know about GP online services and the ways you can support them in using GP online services.