

OFNC

Association of British Dispensing Opticians
Association of Optometrists
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Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians

Optometric Fees Negotiating Committee

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NHS ENGLAND CONFIRMS COVID-19 FUNDING FOR OPTICAL PRACTICES IN ENGLAND AND UPDATES STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

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Since the end of June the OFNC has continued to negotiate hard with NHS England to secure ongoing COVID-19 funding for practices, which was initially [set to end](#) on 30 June. While negotiations continued, we agreed with NHS England that COVID-19 funding for practices in England would be extended to cover July and August, as reported in our sector updates of 20 and 31 July. Given the further delays to NHS England's announcement on funding, we also called for COVID-19 funding to cover September, as reported in our updates of 4 September and 6 October.

The OFNC has today welcomed the belated publication of [NHS England guidance](#) on future COVID-19 funding for GOS contactors in England, which confirms:

- COVID funding for both August and September for all GOS contractors who have delivered at least 40% of their pre-pandemic GOS 1 sight test activity in those months. We understand the September funding will be paid in arrears in November, and the NHS England Business Services Authority will audit a random sample of practices to check their activity has met the 40% threshold
- Some additional COVID funding at a reducing level until the end of 2020 –
 - for all domiciliary providers, and
 - for GOS-dependent fixed practices in deprived areas of England that meet a set of qualifying criteria, or can show they need support on an exceptional basis

We understand the October and November funding will be paid to qualifying contractors in December, and the December funding will be paid in January 2021

- reimbursement for PPE expenses incurred by contractors during the pandemic, via a mechanism to be agreed with the OFNC.

The new guidance also confirms that if public health measures require a regional lockdown or further national lockdown, it may be necessary to return GOS contracts to the operating model used between 1 April and 17 June 2020 to support practices that are open for essential care with average GOS support payments.

The OFNC has already opened discussions with NHS England about 2nd wave monitoring and potential contingency plans.

In the meantime, the OFNC has prepared a new set of Frequently Answered Questions (FAQs) to help practices understand how this further funding will work. These are currently being agreed with NHS England and will be published shortly.

As set out in NHS England's 1 April letter, the OFNC has worked with NHS England to agree the terms of a reduction to the average GOS support payments to reflect savings that contractors will have made on variable costs during the pandemic. After detailed discussion informed by evidence from the sector, the level of reduction has been agreed at 6.43% of the average support payments for mandatory contract holders and 7.86% for additional services (domiciliary) contracts.

We are pleased that this will only apply from 1 April to 17 June – the period during which NHS England had suspended routine sight tests. The deductions are due to start at a date yet to be confirmed, and to be spread between then and 31 March 2021 to support practices with cashflow.

However, the OFNC is also working with NHS England on a pragmatic solution to funding PPE costs incurred by practices before the DHSC PPE Portal became operational in August, and this may affect the deduction plans set out above.

NHS England has also published an updated Standard Operating Procedure (SOP):

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/guidance-and-standard-operating-procedure-primary-care-optical-settings-in-the-context-of-coronavirus-covid-19/>

for optical practices, replacing the SOP published on 17 June. The new SOP includes additional information on communications, staff risk assessments and operating arrangements. The new information largely reflects existing sector guidance.

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