



Budget 2027 submission to Government

Protecting Ireland's eye health and preventing avoidable sight loss

About us

FODO Ireland is the representative body for community eye care providers in Ireland. The Association exists to be the collective voice of its members and to represent them at national level to ensure they can deliver accessible, high-quality, patient-focused eye care to people of all ages and means in their local communities.

FODO Ireland members include, amongst others, Specsavers, Vision Express, Optical Express and the Hakim Group of independent practices. Collectively, FODO Ireland members deliver over 65% of all eye examinations and employ large numbers of CORU registered optometrists and dispensing opticians, as well as many ancillary, clerical and support staff.

Summary

FODO Ireland members deliver eye care services under both the Department of Health and HSE's Community Ophthalmic Services Scheme (COSS) and the Department of Social Protection's PRSI Treatment Benefit Scheme (TBS).

Community optometry is one of the most accessible parts of Ireland's healthcare system, providing early detection, preventative care and ongoing management of eye conditions close to patients' homes. However, Government policy and funding arrangements have not kept pace with rising costs, the ambitions set out in the Primary Eye Care Review or the skills that optometrists and dispensing opticians can now offer.

Budget 2027 provides an opportunity to build on progress made in 2026 on TBS to go further, uplift COSS eye examination fees and to take the next steps with the profession towards delivering a sustainable primary eye care service which meets 21st Century needs and care models.

Detail

Align COSS with TBS fees

The HSE's Community Ophthalmic Services Scheme and the Department of Social Protection's Treatment Benefit Scheme deliver comparable services, but their funding arrangements remain low and misaligned.

In January 2026, the Government increased TBS eye examination fees, but COSS eye examination fees were not uplifted to match despite previous agreements with the profession.

The COSS contract requires eye examination fees to match the eye examination fees for the TBS scheme, but this has not been the case since 2017.

This needs to be addressed urgently and Budget 2027 provides Ministers with the ideal opportunity to level the playing field and access in respect of all State-funded patients. This would also support the sustainability of community services by ensuring HSE patients benefit from the same level of investment as under the TBS.

TBS fees

The Government undertook a review of TBS eye examination fees, resulting in a 20% uplift from 31 January 2026. We welcome this recognition that fees must reflect the cost of delivering care. However, this increase still does not fully meet the cost of providing the service and this funding gap should be addressed.

Dispensing fees under the scheme have not been reviewed in the same way. We ask the Government to commit to a review of dispensing fees as part of Budget 2027 and implement appropriate increases to ensure the scheme remains sustainable and continues to provide value for patients and the State.

Eye care for over 8s

A top priority in ophthalmic public health, and in terms of eye health outcomes, is urgently to tackle the damage to vision young children are suffering by not being able to access eye care unless their parents can pay privately. Currently, there is no State scheme in place to cover routine eye examinations for children aged 8 to 11, and over 12s are only covered if they or their dependents qualify for a full medical card.

These delays in eye care impact on education and training and can have lifelong negative consequences. A national scheme to provide eye care to children between the ages of 8 and 18, initially announced in 2017, now needs to be rolled out nationally to help thousands of young children before it is too late for them.

The Primary Eye Care Review recognised the important role that community optical practices can play in delivering care closer to home and reducing pressure on hospital

and community services. Children are the future and, ten years on without progress, eye care for children remains a national disgrace. Budget 2027 presents the opportunity for the Government to right this injustice and ensure all children receive the timely eye care in local settings they deserve. FODO Ireland would be very willing to work with officials and sector colleagues on this.

Recommendations

As part of Budget 2027, FODO Ireland calls on Government to:

1. Align HSE's COSS scheme to TBS fees and address the funding gap, to deliver parity and ensure sustainability.
2. Review TBS dispensing fees and implement appropriate increases.
3. Invest in our children's future by funding eye care for children aged over eight, as recommended by the Primary Eye Care Review ten years ago.
4. Work with FODO Ireland and the wider sector to support the development of a sustainable, modern community-based eye care system capable of meeting the Nation's growing eye care needs.

FODO Ireland would welcome the opportunity to meet with you or your officials to discuss the recommendations in this submission and how Budget 2027 can mark a sea change in eye health services, especially for children, nationwide.