

29 April 2020

Dear colleagues

NHS England & Improvement financial support for optical practices

The Optical letter published by NHS England & Improvement on 1st April 2020 set out our approach for primary care practices during COVID-19. It outlined the financial support available to practices and acknowledged the need for essential GOS and urgent eye care to be available across all populations in England.

GOS funding to practices who choose to remain open is conditional on their compliance with the guidance we have provided:

Service provision:

Remote reviews and consultations (via phone or video) should be available to prevent the need for patients to attend the practice in person. The [College of Optometrists guidance](#) on providing care during the crisis advises that you should operate a locked-door policy and admit patients for pre-booked appointments only. If practice attendance is required, you should double-check whether the patient or any household member has symptoms of COVID 19. If they have, the patient should be treated via alternative local pathways as appropriate. If they have not, the face-to-face consultation should take place at the patient's normal practice unless:

- appropriate PPE is unavailable, or
- the patient specifically requests an alternative location

NHS England & Improvement recognises that practices may need to exercise flexibility around opening hours in response to patient demand and staff availability, for example opening and closing later than normal practice hours. However, all practices are required to deliver their total contracted hours and should provide clear signposting on their practice website or via alternative points of contact, i.e., answering machines, to ensure that patients know when and how to contact them. Practices should keep their local area team informed of any changes to their status.

Practice classification and financial support:

Based on the information you have provided; your practice has been classified as 'open' and we regard this confirmation of status as your acceptance and agreement to the above service provision requirements. Please let us know at the earliest opportunity if this classification is incorrect.

In return for the provision of these services, NHS England & Improvement will provide monthly payments based on the average monthly value of GOS claims for the period March 2019 through February 2020. This will include voucher claims. Where your actual GOS claims during the crisis exceed this level, you will be paid the additional claims in the usual way.

NHS England and NHS Improvement



This financial support is effective from March 2020, with average monthly payments commencing in May 2020 until further notice (payments are made retrospectively). Your May 2020 payment will also contain an adjustment to top up any GOS claims you submitted for March 2020 to the value of your average monthly claims.

Please note that all electronic claims have been included in the average monthly payment calculations, and to minimise disruption to your financial planning, payments will be made on your normal scheduled date. Please contact us if you have any questions relating to your average monthly payment calculation

This is a grant payment, not a loan. It will be subject to a reduction for variable costs associated with service delivery, which will be agreed with the OFNC. We will provide more information about this process as soon as we can.

GOS claims submissions:

Practices should maintain a log of all patient interactions during the crisis and submit GOS claims (preferably electronically) to PCSE. Details on how to register for the electronic claims service are provided below.

For GOS 1, we recommend that where you provide a remote consultation (and where necessary, a dispense) but don't perform a face to face sight test, you should not submit a GOS 1 claim but should maintain records and make a note of the activity. If you do perform a face to face sight test, you should submit a signed GOS 1 claim observing social distancing and hygiene procedures.

For GOS 3 and 4 claims, you should submit claims without a patient signature provided the claim is annotated 'COVID-19' wherever a patient signature is needed. If you are dispensing spectacles to a patient eligible for GOS 3 but you have not performed a sight test, you should submit a GOS 4 claim rather than a GOS 3. During the crisis GOS 4 authorisation has been extended to cover any adult (not just those with illness-related loss as previously) meeting the following criteria:

- Adults who are clinically deemed by a qualified clinician to require the dispensing of a spectacle prescription, determined without a face-to-face consultation
- Adults who would have otherwise been eligible for a GOS3
- The damaged or lost spectacles to have been older than 2 years if issuing exactly the same prescription as before.

If the dispense is for an adult, the GOS 4 claim will also need pre-authorisation from the NHS Business Services Authority (BSA). You should email them on nhsbsa.paos@nhs.net in the first instance, or telephone on 0300 330 9403 if a timely response is not received via email. BSA will give you a unique claim code to enter on the GOS 4 form. Please bear in mind that BSA are working to a reduced capacity and will aim to respond by the next working day. Please do not duplicate requests to BSA via telephone and email at the same time.

Electronic claims

NHS England anticipates that GOS activity will fall to circa 15% of normal activity. During the crisis, we are therefore asking all contractors to undertake the registration process and submit GOS claims electronically via PCSE Online <https://secure.pcse.england.nhs.uk>, or your Practice Management System's eGOS solution if you have one.

Electronic submission will allow claims to be processed without contact, maximising safety for staff involved enabling all parts of the system to adhere to the government's social distancing recommendations. 'COVID-19' can be entered in the patient signature box for electronic claims submitted during the crisis.

The PCSE Online system is free of charge and very easy to use. It provides you with a quicker and easier method of submitting GOS claims, together with a host of other benefits including:

- no rejected claims, as real time validation flags any errors before submission
- easier monthly payment reconciliation via detailed online statements
- reduction in costs as you will no longer need to post forms

The set up process is simple, so if you haven't already registered please contact the ophthalmic engagement team at pcse.optomengagement@nhs.net who will help you get online and start using the system.

Recording patient activity during COVID-19:

NHS England & Improvement recognises that most of the patient activity during COVID-19 will be managed remotely via telephone or video consultations. We are asking all contractors to record the number of patients who access these services, along with details about the nature of the consultation. This will include the outcome of the consultation, e.g., face to face consultation, referral to urgent and emergency services.

To facilitate this, we are developing a simple online data collection portal to enable a data entry for each patient who is eligible for GOS. This is not intended to replace any existing remote clinical record keeping process you may be following, such as the College of Optometrists Remote Consultation Form, and will be used by NHS England & Improvement to understand the volume and type of GOS activity during the pandemic. Further details about the online data collection portal will follow.

We thank you for your continued support during these exceptional circumstances, and for maintaining essential eye care provision for your patients. Should you have any questions relating to the information provided in this letter, please contact your local commissioning team.

Kind regards

NHS England & NHS Improvement
Optical Services Commissioning