

# Registering As Blind or Partially Sighted

If you have poor sight, it's a good idea to think about registering as blind or partially sighted. This information can help you get the practical support you need.

## What is the register?

Each local authority keeps a register of blind and partially sighted people **living in its area. The register is held by the social services department, or by the local voluntary society for visually impaired people, acting as agents for the local authority. The register is confidential.**

## What is it for?

The aim of the register is to help local authorities provide the best service they can for people with a visual impairment. To do this, they need a record of all the people with a visual impairment in their area, and what kind of services they need.

## Should I register?

Some people worry that registration is a backward step. They fear that it will **lead to them losing their independence, or that family, friends or officials will become interfering or over-protective. No-one can make you register if you don't want to, but it has been shown to be helpful in getting extra support. Obviously if your local authority knows about your needs, then they are more able to help you. A bit of support can make all the difference in keeping your independence. Registering is also essential for claiming some financial benefits and concessions, and for getting help from some local voluntary groups.**

## What do I have to do?

If you are already attending an eye hospital, you should discuss the **possibility of registration with your eye specialist. Or you might prefer to talk it over with a hospital social worker first. Alternatively, you can discuss it with your GP and ask to be referred to a consultant ophthalmologist (eye specialist). The consultant will check your sight, and if appropriate will then certify you as blind or partially sighted by completing the certification form BD8 (BP1 in Scotland, A655 in Northern Ireland).**

## What does the examination mean?

The consultant will measure your distance vision, using the Snellen eye test chart. The chart has nine lines of letters, decreasing in size from the top line. If you can read only the top line, from 6 metres distance, you are described

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as having visual acuity of 6/60. This means that you can see at 6 metres distance what a normally sighted person would see at 60 metres. You would wear your usual spectacles or lenses (if any) for the examination.

## How poor does my sight have to be?

If you are registered as blind this does not necessarily mean that you are, or will be, totally without sight. As a rough guide, you may be registered as blind if your visual acuity is 3/60 or worse, or 6/60 if your field of vision is very restricted because you do not have a full range of sight. For instance, you may have severely reduced side vision. You may be registered as partially sighted if your visual acuity is between 3/60 and 6/60 with a full field of vision, or up to 6/18 (18 is the number of the fourth line down the chart) if your field of vision is very restricted. Loss of sight in one eye only does not necessarily qualify you for registration, unless you have very poor sight in the remaining eye.

## What is the legal definition of blindness?

According to the National Assistance Act 1948, a person can be registered as blind if they are 'so blind that they cannot do any work for which eyesight is essential'. A person may be registered as partially sighted if they are 'substantially and permanently handicapped by defective vision, caused by congenital defect or illness or injury'.

## What happens to the certification form?

If the consultant agrees that you may be registered, he/she will complete the certification form, giving details of the assessment of your vision, and the certification that you are blind or partially sighted. You will be asked to sign the form as agreement to this information being sent to your local authority social services department. You will be given a copy for yourself.

## What if I disagree with the consultant's decision?

If you are unhappy with the outcome of the examination you can ask your GP to refer you to a second specialist.

## What Happens Next?

When social services receive your certification form, a worker should arrange to visit you to see if you want to be added to the register. They should also ask you if there are any services you feel you need. If you agree to be registered, then the date the consultant signed your certification form is the date of registration. There can be delays between

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certification and registration, so it is important to remember that as a disabled person you are entitled to an assessment of your needs by your local social services department, whether you are registered or not. This is called a full needs assessment.

## Help from Social Services

If you are having difficulties because of your poor sight, you should not hesitate to get in touch with your local social services department. Your town hall, library or Directory Enquiries will be able to give you the address and phone number. Services for blind and partially sighted people vary from area to area. In some places there are rehabilitation workers who can teach a range of skills to blind and partially sighted people. These include indoor and outdoor mobility, communication and other skills for daily living. The rehabilitation workers may be part of a team that specialises in working with people with a sight or hearing loss, or they may work in a team that covers a particular geographical area. Sometimes, specialist workers are based in the local voluntary agency for blind and partially sighted people. However, it is still the responsibility of the social services department to arrange for your needs to be assessed. Not every local authority employs specialist workers.

However, it should be possible for social services to 'buy in' any services that were agreed following your needs assessment. If you later move to a different area, you should let the new local authority social services know that you are a registered blind or partially sighted person. Arrangements can then be made for details of your registration to be transferred to your new local authority. We hope you have found this leaflet helpful. If you would like further information, please contact:

## RNIB Welfare Rights and Community Care

The Community Care Advocacy Officer  
Advocacy Service

RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People)

105 Judd Street

London

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WCH18 BNE

Website: [www.nib.org.uk](http://www.nib.org.uk)

Helpline tel: 0203 122 9999

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